

PLAIN PROOF
THAT THE
PUBLIC CREEDS AND FORMS
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,
AT AND SINCE THE REFORMATION,
AND THE
SECESSION-TESTIMONIES,
IN BEHALF OF THESE CREEDS AND FORMS,
Do involve Doctrine erroneous and intolerant.

WITH A
CANDID INQUIRY
CONCERNING SAID DOCTRINE AMONG
ANTIBURGHERS
(REPUBLISHED.)

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
A VINDICATION OF SECEDERS
IN ENDEAVOURING TO ABANDON SAID EVIL:
AND SOME THOUGHTS ON
INFANT-BAPTISM, PRESBYTERY,
AND
SUBSCRIPTION.

BY JAMES WATT, M. D.

GLASGOW:

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P R E F A C E.

THE reader will probably think the following observations dogmatic, severe, and unpolished. The appearance of the first, if it do appear, arises from the studied brevity of the whole, and from a fixed aversion to the repetition of such softening phrases as, *I conceive, it is possible, with submission, &c.* Let it suffice for all these, that the Author acknowledges the whole a matter of opinion—that he may very readily be wrong, and wishes to be open to conviction.

The seeming severity arises, in part, from the same aversion to softening phrases. It arises, also, from an aversion to call that good which appears to be evil. To combat evil by flattering it, must always be an unsuccessful method. It is contrary to the examples we ought to imitate.—*Ye do err*, said our Lord to the Sadducees—“Therefore ye do *greatly* err.”—Said the Same to the wicked in his time, “Ye serpents; ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.” Said Paul.

P R E F A C E.

Paul to the proud philosophers of Athens, "I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious—
"Ye do *ignorantly* worship." He who wishes to turn men from their errors and sins, will not paint these errors and sins in lovely colours, or even as light matters. Still let it be remembered that the severity is intended, not against men, but against their errors and sins. Men may be ill employed, and yet not know what they do; or think they are doing God service. And errors and sins, in the conduct of *good* men, are not to be spared on that account. Here they appear doubly hateful and intolerable. Here, also, reproof has a better prospect of success; and argument, of a fair hearing.

A desire of brevity has led, also, to choose rather a short phrase, if intelligible, than one more elegant: and as it concerns *all* men to be acquainted with religious matters, "plainness of speech" seemed more eligible, than elevated diction.

The brevity of the discussion is suited to the design, which was rather to excite inquiry, than to give full information on important subjects. If the reader wishes more full information on, The nature of Christ's kingdom; the subjects of Baptism, and Human Standards of Religion; he may obtain much useful instruction on these points, as well as on The weekly celebration of the Lord's supper, and
other

PREFACE.

other important matters, in a piece newly published, entitled, "Purity of Christian Communion, recommended as an antidote against the perils of the latter days—Three discourses, delivered to a church of Christ in Richmond-court, Edinburgh."

To such as may reckon such things as a vindication of Seceders; or an approbation of some opinions of Quakers, impertinent to the author; he has only to observe, that he wishes to be a partizan rather of Truths, than of Sects: and so expects to be with different parties on different points.

None need dread his opinions in a political view. They are the same held by Glassites, Sandemanians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers, who are of his Majesty's most loyal and peaceable subjects.

The first of these is the fact that the
 Government has been unable to secure
 the necessary funds to carry out its
 policy of maintaining the peace of
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PLAIN PROOF, &c.

A CLEAR view of the doctrine of religious liberty is of vast importance to the interests of Christianity. This doctrine, generally understood and reduced to practice, would have prevented most of that opposition which has hitherto excluded the knowledge of the gospel from many parts of the globe; which has banished it from some, and oppresses the professors of it in others. This would have prevented, in the conduct of those who assume the Christian name, much of that corruption and abuse which render the profession of the gospel a curse rather than a blessing in society, and exhibit Christianity as despicable and vile to the view of the Heathen world. It must be by the same doctrine and practice that Christianity will be cleared of much of that dross with which it often appears connected, and propagated in purity where the gospel is not known.

The doctrine of religious liberty seems sufficiently simple and obvious. It may be expressed in the following words:

*God alone is Lord equally of every man's conscience.
He hath made it the indispensable duty and unalienable
right*

right of each individual to take care of his own soul; and hath left him free from the doctrines and commandments of men, in all those matters of faith, profession, and worship, which directly affect no person's rights in life, liberty, or property.

Every man, therefore, has a right, before man, to form his judgment in matters of religion; and also openly and explicitly to avow his sentiments, associate with others for celebrating ordinances and exercising public worship, without incurring any legal controul, or any legal detriment or danger to his life, liberty, property, or civil privileges: and no civil magistrate may controul or restrain, by civil pains, religious opinions, practices, or worship, unless such practices or worship be hurtful to the lives or estates of others, or destructive to and inconsistent with human society. In such case indeed the law is for the transgressor; and justice is to be exercised on the injurious, whatever may have been his motive or pretence.

When it is refused that the civil magistrate may controul men in matters merely religious, and not injurious to others, it is also refused that a state can justly make laws so to controul its subjects; for it is indisputable, that the civil magistrate is the organ of the state, and that he may and ought to execute all its just laws. But no law can be just, none ought to exist, none can be harmlessly executed, which prohibits such a freedom of religious opinion, profession, and worship as injures no person, and does not molest civil society.

The doctrine of religious liberty seems abundantly consonant to the word of God. John xviii. 36. "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not
" be

be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." Jesus claimed the character of the Messiah who had been promised. This Messiah was promised as a great and glorious prince. The carnal Jews expected that his greatness and glory would be of that kind which they esteemed, and used to see in the state of princes. Hence the powers of this world were jealous of the Saviour. When he came to this earth, Herod dreaded him as a rival, and evinced his jealousy and cowardice by his cruelty. The unbelieving Jews, on another occasion, thought they opposed his claim to royalty by declaring, "We have no king but Cesar." It was this supposition which founded their accusation, "Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cesar." And to Pilate, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cesar's friend." Pilate accordingly put the question to him, as in verse 33. "Art thou the king of the Jews?" To this question, verse 36. contains a full answer. As if Jesus had said, "It is true I am a king, to this end was I born; but my kingdom is not of such a nature as in the least to interfere with Cesar's interests, or to found the accusation which the Jews have laid. This is evident even from the conduct of my servants on this occasion. If my claim to royalty were of such a nature as to endanger Cesar's interests, my servants would, on this occasion, fight in my defence; and since they do not, and are not permitted, it is evident my kingdom is not of such a kind." This explanation satisfied the deputy of Cesar, that his master's interests were in no danger from the kingdom of Christ; hence he declared, "I find no fault in him."

The same ought to satisfy the professed disciples

of Christ, that Christ's kingdom requires not external violence to extend or maintain it in the world.

The same doctrine which Christ declared to his enemies, he had before inculcated on his disciples. On an occasion, when the sons of Zebedee were irritated against some who would not receive Christ, and desired to imitate the example of Elijah under the Old Testament, and destroy the bodies of unbelievers by fire from heaven, he sharply reproved them; "Ye know not of what spirit ye are. The Son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them." *q. d.* 'Ye totally mistake my errand into the world, if ye think my kingdom admits such means of propagation, or such punishments against recusants.'—Into the same mistake Peter also fell, on that trying occasion, when his master was apprehended. He had a sword, with which he smote the servant of the chief priest, and cut off his ear. He was rebuked, and the wound was healed by him who had "all power in heaven and earth;"—who had twelve legions of angels and more at his call;—who was able to frown his foes into perdition;—who did not submit because he wanted the means of successful resistance, but because his religion required not any such aids, and the use of them was inconsistent with his great design.

This doctrine of Christ was exactly suited to the character given of him, and of his kingdom, in predictions and promises. "He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it be heard in the streets."—"He hath no form nor comeliness, nor beauty that we should desire him." He presents no motive of earthly attachment to any; and as for his kingdom, it shall be established and promoted

moted, "not by might, nor by power, but by my
 "Spirit, saith the Lord." Such also was the view
 of the apostles of Jesus, after their mistakes were
 removed by the Lord's ascension to glory, and the
 dispensation of his blessing to them: Those, who
 before had imagined that it was he who was to
 deliver the Jewish nation from the Roman yoke,
 and were cast down as if all hope were gone;
 three days after his crucifixion had elapsed were
 now satisfied, that "Christ must suffer such things,
 "and enter into his glory;"—that this was the
 throne of his real kingdom;—that thus exalted, he
 executes his dominion;—that thus exalted, he gives
 the laws which his subjects are to obey;—that thus
 exalted, he conducts the warfare in which his sol-
 diers are engaged;—that *the weapons of their proper
 warfare are not* such as affect any matter of tem-
 poral consideration, but that they are *mighty*—
 mighty, not from the exquisite nature of the ma-
 terials of their composition, nor their superior
 structure or fabrication, nor by the numbers,
 strength, or skill of those who wield them—but
mighty through God, through his appointment,
 through his blessing attending, and his power ren-
 dering effectual, not to the subverting of thrones,
 the demolition of fortresses, the destruction of
 fleets, or scaling of citadels; not to the extension
 of carnage among the bodies of enemies; but to
 overcome those enemies which laugh at the shaking
 of the spear, and hold in sovereign derision the
 largest and most potent armaments by sea or land.
 None of these can combat thoughts, opinions,
 reasonings, imaginations. But to overcome these,
 the weapons of the Christian *warfare are mighty*—
 To pull down *strong-holds*, to bring down *imagina-*
tions, and every thing that exalteth itself against the

knowledge of God, and to bring *every thought* into subjection to the obedience of Christ.

To bring every thought into subjection, is the proper business of religion; and to attempt effecting this by external violence, is not only contradictory to express scripture, but also totally incongruous to the nature of religion, the nature of the civil power, and the nature of the soul.

Religion, as far as true, is deep rooted in the soul, and consists, in the first instance, of thoughts; but of thoughts the civil power can take no cognizance. Neither, though it could take cognizance of thoughts, since its force is applicable only to the body, has it any power to change or restrain any one of them. Civil power, therefore, can possibly extend only to external acts of worship. These, as far as they are religious, must proceed upon the command of God, as their sole rule and reason. Hence, if the civil power should command any external act as an act of worship, which is not so commanded of God, it would be sinful to obey him. "We must obey God rather than man; and it is vain to worship him, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." If the external acts be commanded by the Lord, it is on this ground, and not because the civil ruler commands them, that they are to be performed; for it is sinful to have our fear of God taught by the fear of man. And besides, in all such matters the individual is to judge for himself, whether they be the commands of God which he is called to obey. He cannot, without sin, obey the civil ruler in matters of external worship not divinely commanded, nor make his command the reason of performance in those which are commanded, nor obey him in such as may be doubtful. And if obedience in matters of
worship,

worship would be sinful, it must be sinful to command. Indeed the civil ruler cannot *command*, with respect to religious worship, without leaving his sphere both as a *man* and as a *magistrate*. Worship is a matter between every man and his Maker, and with respect to it, all men seem on equal footing. Every man is equally without any right to command another how to worship. He, therefore, who presumes to dictate in this matter, arrogates a kind of worship to himself, and acts unsuitably to that natural equality of human nature which respects religion. He would leave his sphere also as a magistrate, and frustrate the very end of civil rule. The end of government is, that men may enjoy, without molestation, those rights to which all are equally entitled. Religion is surely one of these. The end of human law and government is, that men may not injure each other; not to dictate religion, nor even the exercise of charity, but justice alone. To interfere farther than the security of mutual justice in external conduct requires, seems quite foreign to the province of the civil ruler.

But though the civil ruler could interfere, he is able to be of no real benefit to religion. He can address the mind only with the rewards and punishments of time. All these, however, lose their force, in proportion as real religion takes place in the soul: They are all addressed to that love of the world, and of the things of the world, which is inconsistent with the love of God dwelling in the heart. Accordingly, to address men in favour of religion with a prospect of temporal emolument or disadvantage, is diametrically opposite to the manner of Christ and his apostles. They promised nothing to believers but cross and tribulation in this world; in the next, they set before them glory, honour,

honour, and immortality. The magistrate sets nothing before them in the next world; in this, he offers them freedom from the cross, exemption from tribulation, and the pleasures of sense. The apostle John says, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but of this world." But those who would propagate or maintain religion by civil laws, in effect say, Profess the religion, and ye shall obtain the command of all these. Such is the case, supposing the civil law to favour true religion, and to offer a *bribe*, that those who profess it may be *many*. If the law be in opposition to the true religion, the case must be still worse. A law against true religion cannot be made, without establishing iniquity by a law; and cannot be executed, without fighting against God.

But as all laws respecting religion must terminate on external conduct, they must bear hardest on the conscientious. Those whose ductile consciences can mould themselves to the occasion, like the wax to the seal, will feel but slender restraint from any rules for external conduct in worship; while many of those who feel an obligation of making all religious professions in sincerity, will be much oppressed by any law which can be made on the subject.

Such evils adhere to every intolerant law, and in some degree, to every legal establishment of religion rigorously adhered to. A legal establishment must rest on a civil law, and such a law cannot exist without a civil sanction. This always involves some degree of detriment to dissenters. In all cases, some advantages are unjustly taken or retained from them, and granted to others. The greatest real evil, however, is generally to that church which enjoys

enjoys establishment, and to the political state. Out of both, the men of worth and integrity are thus in great numbers excluded; while a lure is held out to the interested and profane, who, ostrich-like, care not what they swallow, if it may promote their emolument. With such characters, in consequence, many of the vacancies in an established church, and of the places of power and trust in a state, will be filled; for the additional numbers which a church acquires *on account of her legal establishment*, must consist chiefly of such characters as are under the influence of *bribe*.

This doctrine of religious liberty, so congruous to scripture and common sense, was entertained by many of those called Fathers in the Christian church.

Athanasius—"It is the property of piety not to force but persuade, in imitation of our Lord, who forced no man, but left it to the will of every one to follow him; but the devil, because he hath nothing of truth, uses knocks and axes to break up the doors of such as receive him.—Our Saviour is meek, teaching the truth; "Whosoever will, let him come to me."—Not with swords and darts truth is to be declared,—but with persuasion and counsel.—But where have they (Arians) learned to persecute? Not from the saints; but it has been given them and taught them by the devil.—To persecute is the argument of the devil which he seeks against all.—In so far as they banish those who will not subscribe their decrees, they shew that they are contrary to Christians, and the friends of the devil." *In Barclay's Apology, Prop. 14.*

Hilarius—"But, O lamentable! the church, who was once believed for the banishments and imprisonments she endured, now reproves and fights
by

by banishments and imprisonments, and forces herself to be believed;—she, who was once propagated by her banished priests, now banisheth the priests.” *Ibid.*

“ God wills not that any confess him with a constrained will—nor requires a forced confession.” *Ibid.*

Ambrose—“ Christ sent not his apostles to constrain, but to teach.” The same would not communicate with bishops who required hereticks to be put to death. *Ibid.*

Cyprian—“ They were put to death with the outward sword under the old covenant, but now with the spiritual sword, being cast out of the church.” *Ibid.*

Tertullian—“ It is a human right and natural power, that every one worship what he esteems; and one man’s religion doth not hurt nor profit another. Neither is it any piece of religion to force religion, which must be undertaken by consent, and not by violence.” *Ibid.*

Luther—“ Neither Pope nor Bishop hath power to oblige a Christian to one syllable, except it be by his own consent. I call boldly to Christians, that neither man nor angel can impose any law on them but so far as they will.” *Ibid.*

The same doctrine has been held by those called Quakers, from their first appearance.

Barclay—“ Since God hath assumed to himself the power and dominion of the conscience, who alone can instruct and govern it, therefore it is not lawful for any whosoever, by virtue of any authority or principality they bear in the government of this world, to force the consciences of others; and therefore all killing, banishing, firing, imprisoning, or other such things, which are inflicted on men
for

for the alone exercise of their conscience, or difference in worship or opinion, proceedeth from the spirit of Cain the murderer, and is contrary to truth: Providing always, that no man, under the pretence of conscience, prejudice his neighbour in his life or estate, or do any thing destructive to, or inconsistent with human society; in which case the law is for the transgressor, and justice is to be administered upon all, without respect of persons."

Apology for Quakers, Prop. 14.

The same, or similar doctrine, has been long held by many of those called Independents and Baptists, both in England and Scotland, both before and since the Revolution.

The same too has been for a long time the judgment of many of those called Antiburgher Seceders, and has, at their last meeting of General Synod, been adopted as the avowed sentiment of the whole body. This appears by an Act of Synod, dated May 3, 1796, which is to be used as a kind of limitation or explanation of the Formula used at admission of candidates for licence and ordination.

"The Synod declare,—That they approve of no other means of bringing men into the church, or retaining them in it, than such as are spiritual, and were used by the apostles, and other ministers of the word, in the first ages of the Christian church; persuasion, not force;—the power of the gospel, not the sword of the civil magistrate, agreeably to that most certain and important doctrine, *God alone is Lord of the conscience.*"

The same principle has been, in a great degree, adopted in practice by the wisdom and clemency of the British Government, mostly since the Revolution; and many laws of an intolerant spirit and tendency,

tendency, though still unrepealed, are suffered to sleep in disuse. Peaceable subjects are not compelled in religious matters, and the right of every man to think for himself, seems to be at least tacitly recognized. In the mean time, many of the exclusive privileges of the state-religion are viewed by the serious Non-conformist as most hurtful to that religion which enjoys them.

The above doctrine of religious liberty has been opposed, and the contrary doctrine embraced and reduced to practice, by most of those called Christians, ever since Constantine rendered Christianity a national religion. This doctrine is, *That the civil magistrate ought to have official authority over others in matters purely religious, such as religious opinion, profession, or worship.*

The doctrine appears in two forms.

In one, the chief civil magistrate is held supreme over all persons and *causes ecclesiastical* as well as civil. Such was the power claimed by Henry VIII. of England (when he had rejected the Pope's authority) and by many of his successors.

In the other form, the church, by her spiritual officers, as they have been designed, decrees and commands, and the civil magistrate must execute the due punishments, in externals, accordingly. The Pope, in his own territory, where he was a temporal prince as well as head of the church, conjoined both these forms of intolerance. He practised on the latter in those nations which submitted to his spiritual supremacy. With or without the council of his clergy he determined what was heresy, who were heretics, and then enjoined the princes of Europe, who were his executioners, to enforce his decrees against whomsoever passed, princes or subjects.

A prin-

A principle of intolerance, *nearly similar* to the above, in its second form, was adopted by many Protestant churches, immediately after the Reformation. Particularly,

An intolerant principle, investing the civil ruler with official power to defend the church against all idolaters and heretics—to root out all doctrines of devils and men, has been received by the church of Scotland in her public creeds, and has been, to a certain degree, retained by her, ever since the Reformation.

Now, though the church do not claim infallibility, as the Pope did, to found her decrees, nor the Prince the same infallibility to found his conduct; yea, though the church of Scotland condemn, in words, both the supremacy of the Pope and of the Prince in religious matters, yet while the above principle is retained, the difference is but small. It is but a small matter to the person reckoned a *heretic*, whether it be in pursuance of the Pope's Bull, and according to a decree of the Council of Trent, or in the consequence of an Act of the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, (for each has been called the spiritual power,) and to underprop her authority according to his coronation-oath, that the civil magistrate exercise his sword against him, and others, to root them out of the nation.

That the above intolerant principle has been taught in the public creeds of the church of Scotland, a very few documents will prove. In adducing these, however, I mean no disrespect to the first Reformers, whose memory I venerate. I wish to make all allowances for their conduct, from the necessity of their times—their great distress—the disposition of their enemies—their long continued

habits—their experience of the modes used by others for propagating religion—their ardent zeal and imperfect views of Christian liberty. These, or similar circumstances, might lead them to use means, lay down general rules, and justify or recommend practices, which, if generally adopted, would be pernicious, and subversive of religious liberty.

'Tis not with particular instances of conduct among the first Reformers we have to do, but with the abstract doctrines of their creeds. And even these might rest in peace, if the professed friends of the Reformation would cease to require a virtual approbation of them, as a condition of church-fellowship. It is possible to esteem the man after God's own heart, and yet to detest murder and adultery even in him: It is possible to value highly the courageous disciple of Jesus, and yet disapprove his dastardly conduct in denying his Master, and his uncandid manner of pleasing men at Antioch, Gal. ii.: And it is possible to value highly the character and much of the doctrine of eminent Reformers, and yet reject their tenets, when they seem intolerant. When I allege that similar intolerant doctrine is yet retained in the public creeds of the church of Scotland, I am very far from supposing that such is the real sentiment of all the members of said church. With respect to many of them, the opposite is notoriously true. The question on consistency between private sentiments and public creeds, to which adherence is professed, I at present defer.

However liberal the sentiments of many who profess adherence to the creeds of said church may be, these creeds themselves do evidently involve the above intolerant principle.

The

The Confession of Faith, used by the English church at Geneva, was adopted by the church of Scotland at the beginning of the Reformation.

Art. 4. "I acknowledge to belong to the church a politic magistrate: And as Moses, Hezekiah, Josiah, and other godly rulers, purged the church of God from superstition and idolatry; so the defence of Christ's church appertaineth to the Christian magistrates, against all idolaters and heretics, to root out all the doctrines of devils and men."

Confession authorized by Parliament of Scotland 1560 and 1567, Art. 24.

"To kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates we affirm, that chiefly and most principally doth belong the conservation and purgation of religion;" in which he is to be aided as "God's lieutenant."

This is the Confession which is recognized in the National Covenant, 1580 and 1651, as "in all points—God's undoubted truth and verity;" and it is declared, That "the stability of our religion and kirk doth depend on the safety and good behaviour of the king's majesty, as a comfortable instrument of God granted to this country for the maintaining of his kirk," &c.

At the renewing of the National Covenant, many Acts of Parliament are mentioned with approbation, under the designation of *laudable* or *loveable* Acts, which breathe the same spirit. Thus, Act 104. Parl. 7. James VI. defines several superstitious observances to be idolatry, and appoints them to be punished with death, in their second instance. To the same purpose is the Act appointing the coronation-oath for the king, Act 4. Parl. 1. Charles I.

This oath bound the king to maintain the true religion of Jesus then received in the land—"Abolish

lish and gainstand *all false* religion contrary to the same—be careful to root out of his empire all heretics and enemies to the true worship of God, *who shall be convicted by the kirk of the aforesaid crimes*, according to the practice of godly ancestors.” So the king swore 1633; and to aid him in fulfilling his oath, the people covenanted afterward. Here let me ask, Did the Reformers indeed wish all whom they reckoned heretics to be so treated? Either they did, or it was a part of their system that the king should be in the constant guilt of perjury, by neglecting to act according to his oath.

The Solemn League and Covenant breathes the same spirit. In it persons swore to the several supposed duties, according to their places and stations.

Art. 2. “With our hands lifted up to the most high God, we do swear, that we shall (in our places) without respect (not of *tenets*, but) of *persons*, endeavour the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy—superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found [by the church] to be contrary to sound doctrine.”—What was the part of a church-member in his place, in this matter? What was the duty of church-officers and courts? What was the duty of the king? It was their part to discover the heretic, and to prove his guilt; it was the king’s, according to his oath, to punish.

The Solemn League and Covenant led the way to the forming of the Westminster Confession, which was to constitute a part of the *uniformity* engaged to in the Covenant; and this Confession adopts the same sentiment. Indeed it must embrace the same sentiment, or it would be inconsistent with its own design, as the standard of a state religion.

Chap,

Chap. 20. 4. "For publishing such opinions as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing and maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, (persons) may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church, and the power of the civil magistrate."

Chap. 23. 3. "The civil magistrate hath authority, and it is his *duty* to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church;—that the truth of God be kept pure and entire;—that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions of worship, or discipline, prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed: for the better affecting whereof, he hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide, that whatever is transacted at them be according to the mind of God."

Now, if the magistrate's duty and authority be indeed as here stated, it is his duty also, in preserving *unity*, to prevent and restrain dissenters and non-conformists. If he hath authority to keep truth *pure* and *entire*, he hath authority also to judge for his subjects, when it is pure and when entire. He is judge of doctrine. If he hath authority to suppress heresies, correct redundancies, and guard against defects in discipline, worship, and all the ordinances of God, it would be absurd to suppose him without a right to decide, and authority to determine, what is not, and what is *heresy*;—what is, and what is not an abuse in

worship

worship or discipline;—what is, and what is not a due observance of *all* the ordinances of God. In this management he is either to judge for himself, or to be conducted by the advice of church-men. The difference here is of small importance, as has been already observed. It seems, however, that he is to judge for himself; for he has power, so far, to take cognizance of church-men in their ecclesiastical official conduct, as to be present at Synods, and to provide that whatever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God. He then, and not the Synod, (according to this Article,) is to be judge what this mind is.

It is true, in Conf. 20. 2. it is declared, That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men;” but it is added, “which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it.” And we see by Art. 4. of same chapter, that not the person himself, but some other for him, is to judge what doctrines and commandments of men are contrary to the word of God. Indeed, whoever will read the whole chapter, may observe that Art. 2. is explained and limited by Art. 3. and 4. and according to this explanation, and to chap. 23. 3. above considered, are we to understand what seems to be said in chap. 20. 2. in favour of liberty of conscience. This view is confirmed still farther by Larger Cat. 109. where the tolerating a false religion is stated as one of the sins forbidden in the second commandment.

Such was the doctrine of the church of Scotland in *reforming times*, and such is the doctrine her members, as such, still profess to believe, and to which they engage adherence. It is true, that
this

this Confession was adopted by the church of Scotland with some exceptions, as appears by Act of Assen. Aug. 27th, 1647. Sess. 23. but since, none of said exceptions are laid against any of the Articles above noticed; they do not affect the validity of the conclusion formed from said Articles. Neither is the same conclusion affected, though it be alleged that the church of Scotland allowed none to be punished by the civil magistrate for error, heresy, &c. but such as were previously convicted by the church. Since, in this case, supposing any difference of views to exist between the church and the magistrate, the latter must either use his own judgment as to the guilt or innocence of the accused, or follow implicitly the dictates of the church. This last, we have already seen, is scarcely more tolerable than the other. It injures the magistrate, by degrading him to be the tool of church-men;—it injures the subjects, by compelling the magistrate to violate their religious liberty.

But, though no doctrine hostile to religious liberty and the sacred rights of conscience were to be found embodied in these forms, still such doctrine would appear evidently exemplified, In,

The *ends* for which these forms were ratified by civil law.

The *mode* observed in prosecuting these ends: and,

The declared *opinions* of those most active in the prosecution.

The great end and design of the whole plan of legal ratification, taking for granted the sincerity of those concerned, seems to have been, *to establish and preserve in the whole nation, by the power of the civil authority, an uniformity in the profession and practice*

practice of what was called the true religion. Now as civil laws cannot exist without civil sanctions addressed to the fears of contraveners, or to the hopes of the obedient; all dissenters being contraveners were liable to the penalty:—It was therefore altogether impossible, that the great object desired could be attained without an outrage on the rights of conscience, while there remained in the nation any conscientious dissenters. Thus the very *idea* and *plan* of a legal covenanted national *uniformity* in religion was, in its nature, exclusive of religious liberty, and involved a degree of intolerance.

The prosecution of the plan was quite correspondent, as appears by many Acts both of ecclesiastical and civil judicature. The former craving, and the latter appointing the imposition of these forms, under *civil sanctions*.

Many Acts both of Assembly and of Parliament might be adduced to this purpose. Of this the Acts of Parliament cited in the preamble to the National Covenant afford pertinent proof.

To this purpose also, we find that the king gave a charge to the clergy in Scotland, March 2d, 1580, To “order the subscribing of the Confession, and to deliver recusants to the civil power.” According to this appointment, the Assembly enacted, April, 1581, Sess. 9.—and October, 1581, Sess. 5.

But to come to more modern, and what are called more pure times of the church: August 12th, 1639, Supplication of Assembly.—“The king is God’s vicegerent over us for the maintenance of religion. We do most humbly supplicate your grace, his majesty’s commission, &c. to enjoin

join by Act of Council, that this Confession and Covenant be subscribed by *all* his majesty's subjects."

The prayer of this supplication was granted by Act of Council, August 30th, 1639, "The Lords of Council ordain the said Confession and Covenant to be subscribed in all time coming, by all his majesty's subjects, of what rank and quality soever."—Same day, Assen. Sess. 23. enacted, thus,—“ We ordain of new, that all masters of colleges, &c. all scholars at passing degrees, all persons suspected of Papistry, or any other error; all the members of this kirk and kingdom, subscribe the same (opposing the Articles of Perth;) and in all humility supplicate his majesty's high commissioner, and the honourable estates of parliament, by their authority, to ratify and enjoin the same *under all civil pains*: which will tend to the glory of God, the preservation of religion, of the king's majesty's honour, and perfect peace of this kirk and kingdom.”

The desire of this supplication is fully granted, June 11th, 1640, Char. I. Parl. 2. Act. 5. which, accordingly, *under all civil pains*, enacts and ordains. These acts respected the National Covenant and Old Confession. Those which follow relate to the Solemn League.

Edinburgh, October, 1643.

“ The commissioners of the convention of estates, ordain the same (S. L.) to be with all religious solemnities sworn and subscribed by *all* his majesty's subjects of this kingdom, and that under the pain to such as shall *postpone* or *refuse*, to be esteemed and *punished as enemies* to religion, his majesty's honour, and peace of thir kingdoms, and to have their *goods and rents confiscate* for the use of the public; and that they shall not
bruik,

bruik, nor enjoy any benefit, place, nor office; and also ordains *all* sheriffs, stewards, and others, his majesty's magistrates to burgh and land, and committees in the severall shires, to be assisting to ministers and presbyteries in procuring real obedience hereunto:—And that, with all diligence, they make report to the Committee of Estates of the names of all such persons as shall *postpone* or *refuse*, to the effect course may be taken with them as aforesaid; and that they may be cited to answer next parliament, as enemies to religion, king, and kingdoms, and to receive what further punishment his majesty and parliament shall inflict on them: And further, ordains thir presents to be printed and published at the market crosses of the head boroughs of this kingdom, wherethrough none pretend ignorance of the same." Col. Conf. 88. 89.

This seems very like a system of terror which needs not, but is above comment: And of this the Assembly appears to have been sensible afterwards, when, in the conclusion of the acknowledgment of sins, and renewal of Covenant, December, 1648, they observe, that formerly, "some through fear, others—upon base ends, and human interests, have entered thereinto, who—have dealt deceitfully with the Lord, in swearing falsely by his name." Indeed, if the same system of terror continued as to the swearing or renewing of the covenant, those who renewed it will scarcely obtain full credit, when they protest before the Searcher of hearts, (as in the same engagement to duties) that every one of them is free from the influence of any politic advantage, private interest, or by-end, or any terror or persuasion of men, or any hypo-

crisfy

crisy or deceit, in again taking on them the oath of God. This will appear the more likely, when it is considered, that now the covenanters bound themselves, if it were possible, more strictly than before, as we see, *Engagement, Article 1.* To carry on the work of *uniformity*, and secure religion, not only against Papists, but particularly against Independency, Anabaptism, &c. &c. It scarcely can be thought when such motives of a worldly kind were presented to induce to covenanting, or deter from postponing, that all the ungodly and profane, all erroneous, heretical and schismatic persons, all Independents, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Arminians, Socinians, and Libertines, or others of like stamp, as Erastians, Familists, and Sceptics, were, at that time, so singularly conscience-bound, as not to be in some measure moved by worldly interest, in their covenanting, and also in renouncing all *by-ends*, in the transaction.

In this matter the royal example was very remarkable; it was a part of the system that the king should swear the covenants. An Act of Parliament was at one time passed, bearing, "That all kings of Scotland should approve and swear the covenant; that there be a *king's religion*; and that unless the king be of the same religion as the parliament, no deed of his should be valid." See Coll. Conf.—Coll. Act.

Accordingly the king, by his coronation-oath, in June, 1650, and January, 1651, was bound to execute all the laws which had been made in favour of the covenanted religion, during the foregoing years. Among these laws certainly those for the imposition of the Covenants and Confession, under all civil pains, were included. This oath indeed he soon violated, as his father had previously violated

violated a similar oath, appointed Act. 4. Parl. 1. Char. I. and already quoted. Indeed this was to be expected. None acquainted with human nature, or with his character, could think him sincere: And none, who on the one side of the alternative viewed a crown and the covenant, and on the other candour, libertinism, and indigence, could think him free from sinister motives, in covenanting and swearing the coronation-oath. Indeed, it would have been most wicked in him to have kept these oaths in every instance, though it was no less so for him to swear them, and break them in the manner he did.

Thus from the *manner* in which the public forms in the church of Scotland were imposed, and the way in which the covenanted uniformity was *profecuted*, we see an evident exemplification of intolerance.

That there is no overstraining or misrepresentation of matters, in the above account of the legal prosecution of the covenanted uniformity, will appear evident also from the sentiments of those engaged in said prosecution, as these appear in their writings.

Mr. Samuel Rutherford, professor of divinity in the university of St. Andrews, was a commissioner from the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, to the Westminster Assembly. Mr. David Dickson, professor of divinity in Edinburgh, also bore a great share in carrying on the Reformation in Scotland, and in promoting the Covenants, and covenanted uniformity. Such as these may be justly esteemed to afford us a good sample of the general opinion of the church, on the parts of the Confession under consideration, and on the whole subject.

Mr.

Mr. Rutherford, a divine of uncommon liberality of opinion, for the time in which he wrote; in a book written expressly in favour of religious liberty against Erastus, &c. entitled, A "Peaceable Plea for Presbytery," has the following sentiments: pag. 443. "We all, (i. e. Reformers,) think the cumulative consent of the godly magistrate is necessary to excommunication, because *he is obliged to join his sanction and authority to all Christ's ordinances.*" 539, 540.—"Even Nero, when the church of God is in his court and dominions, hath the same *jus*, the same authority and official power, to be a keeper of both tables of the law, and to defend the gospel, and to command the preachers and Synods to fulfil their charge, and to see that the officers do their duty, and to punish dumb dogs, idolators, excommunicated persons: to drive away with the sword, false teachers from the flock, while he is a heathen, and when he is converted to the Christian faith." *Confer.* 553, "The magistrate, in a constitute church, is to determine civilly, and sentence, and civilly punish the ministers, that are either dumb dogs, and will not bark; or that pervert the souls of the people with false doctrine, and where the church is constituted, it is presumed that the *priests, whose lips should keep knowledge*, have determined, in an ecclesiastical way, the very same which the judge civilly is to determine; not because the church hath so determined, but because he judgeth in his conscience it to be according to the word of God."

546. "We never denied but the magistrate commandeth both the exercise of church power

simply, and the manner, and such qualifications as are external and obvious to the knowledge of the magistrate, such as blasphemous and false doctrine is ; but we deny, that, as a magistrate, he doth command the spirituality of the action."

547. "The magistrate as magistrate, is to be *custos et vindex utrinque tabulae*: (the guardian and avenger of both tables of the divine law) yea, I think he is keeper of the gospel too, and preserver, and is to command men to serve Christ, and profess the gospel; and to punish the blaspheming of Christ."

557. "The same (i. e. Remonstrant Arminians) hold that pastors are to preach whatever in their own conscience seems to be the truth of God: a principle of those who are for toleration of all religion, though Judaism and Turcism: a way I am persuaded *most abominable*, and which the Lord of his church will crush when he shall bring down other Antichristian untruths to the ground." Thus, the professor of divinity, at St. Andrews, who having been a commissioner at the Westminster Assembly, must have known the meaning of the Westminster Confession. We may hear another professor on the same point.

Mr. David Dickson, in his prelections on the same Confession, delivered to his numerous pupils, and disseminated through the kingdom. On Conf. 20. 4. "Q. Do not Lutherans, Arminians, Anabaptists, Quakers, and all sorts of heretics and sectaries *err*, who maintain under pretext of Christian liberty, that the civil magistrate is not in duty to punish any man with the sword, for errors in doctrine; but that they ought to be tolerated and suffered, provided such persons as own them, do not trouble or molest the commonwealth? *A. Yes.*"

On

On Conf. 23. 3. " Q. Do not the Papists err, who maintain that the judgment of religion doth not belong to the civil magistrate? A. Yes."

The above two eminent Reformers, were not by themselves in their opinion. In 1645, the General Assembly appointed a committee to draw up propositions on *this* and other connected subjects. The result was what are called the 111 *Propositions*. In 41st of these, it is stated, " Every civil magistrate, being by God himself constituted the *keeper and defender of both tables of the law*, may and ought to preserve religion pure, and restore it when decayed and corrupted:—as likewise, to restrain and punish, as well Atheists, blasphemers, heretics, and *schismatics*, as the violators of civil justice and peace."

42. " Wherefore the opinion of those sectaries of this age, is altogether to be disallowed, who deny to him the authority and right of restraining heretics and schismatics ; if so be he conceive them to be such as noway violate the laws of the commonwealth, and in nowise disturb the civil peace."

64. " He punisheth externally idolaters, blasphemers, heretics, sacrilegious persons, profaners of holy things ; and according to the measure of the sin, he condemneth to death or banishment ; forfeiture of goods or imprisonment : he guardeth and underproppeth ecclesiastical canons with civil authority, restraineth or expelleth the insolent and untamed disturbers of the church." The same sentiment occurs in several other of the propositions.

On the subject of these propositions the highest ecclesiastical authority gave decision, September 1st, 1647, Assembly, Sess. 29, in an Act for the purpose. In this Act they agreed on eight heads of doctrine. The 8th is, " The civil magistrate may
c 2 and

and ought to suppress by corporal or civil punishment ; such as by spreading error or heresy, or by fomenting schism, greatly dishonour God, dangerously hurt religion, and disturb the peace of the kirk:"—which heads of doctrine, "howsoever opposed by the authors and fomenters of the foresaid doctrines respectively, the General Assembly doth firmly believe, own, maintain, and commend unto others, as solid, true, orthodox, grounded on the word of God, consonant to the judgment of the ancient and best reformed kirks."

The practice was in the times of greatest note for reformation, either correspondent to such doctrine, or judged improper or sinful. Only one example shall be given to illustrate this. In an anonymous book, printed 1707, in vindication of the Presbyterians of Scotland, against some querist Episcopal pamphleteers, and dedicated by Alexander Henderson to the magistrates of Edinburgh. The author, p. 39. comparing the state of morality when the Prelates were in power with its state under Presbyterians ; and having stated, that under the former, a Christopher Irwin, a professed atheist, was not only spared, but employed in his medical character and countenanced ; whereas, under the latter, a student in the college of Edinburgh, "falling under impressions of Deism, and found guilty of blasphemies against the Trinity, and our Saviour's incarnation, and in judgment, appearing obstinate, was, as all Scotland know, according to our laws against blasphemers, made an example of shame and justice, being hanged betwixt *Leith* and *Edinburgh*, and appointed to be buried there, in the place where notorious criminals and malefactors are hanged in chains, and denied the common place of Christian burial. This I," says the author, "with many

many others, was witness to; though this poor youth, a little before, and at his death, confessed his guilt, professing to fly to Christ for mercy; and was related to some of eminent note, and even of his judges. Now let our *prefacer* (querist) or any of his party produce, if they can, such an instance of exemplary impartial justice upon the many blasphemers, during the time of Prelacy."

This example is adduced, to shew what was the *real practical meaning* of the laws, in church and state already considered, and to *prove* that said laws were in their intention *intolerant*, and that the Reformers prized and esteemed them on that very account.

It is true, no such thing is done, or can be done, at present, in Scotland.—At present, the Act of Toleration, 1712, with the practical separation of civil pains, from ecclesiastical excommunication, have rendered it impracticable: Nevertheless, the Westminster Confession is still the avowed creed of the national church of Scotland, to every Article of which all her ministers and licenciates swear, assert, and solemnly subscribe; and Art. 4. of Cap. 20. of said Confession; and also Art. 3. of Cap. 23. are the same as ever; have the same meaning, and ascribe the same power over religious conduct to rulers.

Now, when ministers give an affirmative assent, in their ordination vows, to that in quest. 2d. of the Formula. "Do you *sincerely own* and *believe* the *whole doctrine* contained in the Confession of Faith, approved by the General Assembly of this church, and ratified by law, in 1690, *to be founded* on the word of God? And do you acknowledge the same as the confession of your faith, and will you *firmly* and constantly adhere thereto, and—assert, maintain, and defend the same?—3d. Do you disown all—doctrines, tenets, and opinions what-

soever contrary to and inconsistent with the fore-said Confession of Faith?"—When ministers, in the manner of a solemn vow, give assent to the above, and licentiates engage in a similar way, no person who is witness, and *who gives them credit for integrity and honesty; for being as much in earnest, in religious matters as in civil; and in their transactions with God as they should be in dealings with men, speaking as they think, the truth in their heart,* can avoid believing that every one of them believes Conf. 20. 4. & 23. 3. as well as every other Article in said Confession.*

From this subscription, from the very nature of a church legally established, from the foundation on which the Revolution church sat down, namely, the same relation between church and state which had subsisted *anno* 1592, of which above, and from the numerous instances in which the state has interfered in the affairs of religion, and the church concurred in the interference since the same Revolution, with the enumeration of all which I shall not detain the reader: it seems abundantly evident, that erroneous doctrine, hostile to religious liberty, may be justly charged on the public creeds of the church of Scotland, not only *at*, but also *ever since* the Reformation.

However, let it be observed, not men but doctrines are here treated of. There is great reason to believe, as was observed at outset, that many, both ministers and others, in this church, have their sentiments much more sound on this point than their ecclesiastical professions, and are, notwithstanding of these, firm friends of religious liberty, and foes to all persecution and intolerance.

I proceed

* The same is true of all, who use the same Formula, in the same manner.

I proceed now to shew, That

The Seceſſion Teſtimony alſo was, till very lately, chargeable with teaching, and approving, the ſame erroneous intolerant doctrine.*

This might be evinced by a review of thoſe papers which have been acknowledged of public authority among them, and to which they, in one reſpect or another, profeſſed adherence; ſuch as their Act, Declaration and Teſtimony, and others of like nature. As, however, thoſe ſummaries of profeſſion, uſed at the ordination of miniſters and lay-elders, contain the chief points of profeſſion—attention to ſuch points ſhall ſuffice. And though, as we ſhall ſee, the Burgher-Seceders come not behind their brethren in attachment to the above error; the Formula of the Antiburghers, having been long in print, and ſo, more public than that of the others, ſhall guide our enquiry.

This *Formula* contains a number of queſtions, ſo conſtructed, that answers to them by a ſimple *affirmative* or ſimple *negative*, conſtitute a declaration of the answerer's principles, and of his engagement to certain duties. Its deſign ſeems to be, that the answerer may have a more ſtrong obligation to ſtedfaſtneſs in the doctrines he profeſſes, and be the more deeply impreſſed with the ſenſe of his important duties. It ſeems intended alſo as a public declaration to the world of the principles of the party, and of the terms on which a congregation receives its paſtor, and the paſtor accepts the charge; alſo, upon which he obtains and accepts fellowſhip in the miniſtry, with the Preſbytery, by which he is ordained or licenced. Hence the queſtions

* We have ſeen above, p II, that a change has been lately effected on this ſubject among the Antiburghers, and a more complete change is in expectation.

tions are put and answered in public, and no exceptions nor explications were hitherto used in public. Sometimes, indeed, some explication or exception has been admitted in private, or before the courts; but in public before an assembly none has appeared, and it is more than probable none could be admitted.

The answers to these questions are called ordination vows, and indeed have all the solemnity of an oath, as appears evident by the solemn conclusion which affects all the questions.—“All those things you promise and engage, through grace,—as you will be *answerable* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints, and as you would desire to be found among that happy company at his glorious appearing.” Now, common sense and common honesty require, that, according to Conf. 22. 4. “An oath—be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation.” The doctrine of Seceders, on this head, is what appears in an overture presented to the Antiburgher Synod, which met at Glasgow, 1792, and which was appointed to be revised for publication by their committee. Art. 11. of this is, That “the Synod—profess, declare, and assert, that confessions, creeds, and catechisms—are to be received, subscribed, and adhered to in their plain and obvious meaning, without equivocation or mental reservation; and that to subscribe or profess our belief of *Articles*, which we judge unscriptural, for the sake of peace or worldly advantage, is a *most unpardonable outrage* against Christian integrity and common honesty.” Accordingly, a minister of the same party, stating the contrast between the Socinian doctrines of a minister of Ayr, and his “free and unqualified adoption of the confession in
“ the

“the—Formula,” scruples not to charge said minister with “duplicity and treachery,”—“baseness and dishonesty.” * Indeed, he fully proves the justness of the charge.

Now, since this is the doctrine of Seceders on subscriptions, it would be both harsh and unfair, without direct evidence, once to suppose that their Formula does not afford true information of their real principles, or that it is not to be understood in its *plain obvious sense*.

At this Formula, then, let us enquire, *What is the public doctrine of the Secession with respect to the just power and interference of civil rulers, in matters of faith, profession, and worship?*

Formula, quest. 2d, “Do you sincerely own and believe the *whole doctrine* contained in the Confession of Faith, as the said Confession was received and approved by an Act of Assembly, 1647, Sess. 23, and likewise the *whole doctrine contained* in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms—to be founded upon the word of God: and do you acknowledge the said Confession as the confession of your faith; and will you, through grace, firmly and constantly adhere to the doctrine of said Confession and Catechisms—and, to the utmost of your power, assert, maintain, and defend the same against all—doctrines, tenets, and opinions whatsoever, contrary to, or inconsistent with the said Confession and Catechisms.” It is very difficult to conceive a more universal and unqualified approbation of, and adherence to a Confession, than is here given of *every point of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession*. This adherence, therefore, in the *plain, obvious,*

* Scriptural Detection of Satan transformed into an angel of light. Page 177, 178.

obvious, unequivocal sense of the words includes the erroneous doctrine of Conf. 20. 4. 23. 3, and of Larger Cat. quest. 109, already considered, as really as any other doctrine of said Confession or Catechism: and the Formula gives as much assurance, that these Articles are the real sentiments of the adherer, as it does concerning any other Article. There is no room to evade this charge but by supposing, that an exception of these Articles is contained in that clause of the question, "As the said Confession was received and approved of by Act of Assembly, 1647, Sess. 23. This Act, however, contains no such exception, but relates to other and quite different points, as appears by consulting it.*

This part of the solemn vows, of itself, is sufficient to found our charge. It is still farther confirmed in

Quest. 4th, "Do you own and acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the National Covenant, particularly, as explained by General Assembly, 1638, to abjure the Hierarchy, and the five Articles of Perth: Do you likewise own and acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the Solemn League and Covenant—particularly, as renewed in Scotland, with an acknowledgment of sins and engagement to duties, in—1648: and do you promise, through grace, to adhere to these Covenants, and in your station to prosecute the ends of them?"

A person desirous to know the adherer's mind on the point in question, and hearing this part of the solemn *profession* and *vow*, would go to these Covenants in search of the faith and duty declared and promised. He is also referred to the acknowledgment

* This Act is prefixed to, and printed with the common Copies of the Confession.

ledgment of sins and engagement to duties. He surely, then, could not be charged with wronging the adherer, though he should ascribe to him the doctrine of these Covenants on this point. Whether or not these Covenants contain intolerant doctrine, we have already enquired and decided: and whether the *ends* of these Covenants, one of which certainly was, *to be able to enforce, by civil pains, a national uniformity in religion*, here professedly adopted by the answerer, do not involve intolerance, and a tendency to persecution, the reader of what has been above said on that uniformity will judge.

Further, Quest. 5th, "Do you approve of the Act, Declaration and Testimony—for the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the church of Scotland, enacted and emitted by the Associate Presbytery: and do you, in your judgment, disapprove of the several steps of defection—condemned in said Act, as contrary to the word of God, the Confession of Faith, the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three nations?"

This question leads our enquirer to consider said Act and Testimony on the point in question. It shews that Seceders did not reckon themselves dissenters from, but most strict adherents to the true church of Scotland. It shews also, that they thought right to testify against what might be inconsistent with the Covenants. This would say, that the Testimony is expressly in behalf of a legal national uniformity, and against whatever opposes it; but let it speak for itself.

This Testimony, in the approving part, page 55, 56, 58, commends the *Parliamentary approbation, ratification, and confirmation* of several steps of reformation.

formation. The Solemn League and Covenant is commended as in "matter *just and warrantable*," and for the "ends, necessary and commendable." Seceders thus reckon the oath to extirpate, without respect of persons, Popery and Prelacy, just and warrantable. They reckon the enforcing an uniformity by civil laws, which was doubtless one end of this Covenant, necessary and commendable. Page 60. We read of this covenanted uniformity being reckoned *nationally* binding, by the acknowledgment of sins and engagement to duties, made 1648, whereby the Solemn League was renewed in Scotland.

In Article 5th, of his approving part, Seceders much approve the legal establishment given to the work of Reformation in 1640, the Act, 1644, approving the Solemn League, the Act for purging the army of persons disaffected to the cause and work of Reformation; by which last named Act, civil and political advantage are suspended on religious character. This conduct of the state is not commended here, because politically good, and tending to the safety of the state only; but because thus the state lent its "helping hand to the work of Reformation." But chiefly, they approve, and testify for the Act of Parl. 1649, which provides, "That before the king's majesty, who now is, or any of his successors, shall be admitted to the exercise of royal power, he shall *assure and declare*, by his solemn oath under his hand and seal, his allowance of the National Covenant, and of the Solemn League—and his obligation to prosecute the ends thereof in his station and calling: and that he shall, for himself and his successors, consent and agree to Acts of Parliament *enjoining the Solemn League*, and fully establishing Presbyterian government, the directory

rectory for worship, Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as they are approved by the General Assembly of this Kirk,—in all his majesty's dominions; and that he shall observe these in his practice and family." Here observe, by the plain obvious meaning of the words in Formula, Q. 5. and in Testimony Disp. 61. 62. Seceders are to be understood as *approving* this Act as a condition, to Charles II. and all succeeding kings in these realms, of enjoying the *exercise of royal power*. Therefore, they must be understood as *approving* what this condition and oath bound the sovereign to observe. But, *To what did it bind him?*

It bound him in his *station* and calling (as a prince) to allow the Covenants and prosecute the ends of them. Now, how could a prince, as such, *extirpate* Popery, and Prelacy, superstition, heresy, *schism*—and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound doctrine,* without civil interference in religious matters? How shall he extirpate schism, but by enforcing uniformity? This enforcing then the Testimony approves. Another part of his obligation, was to agree for himself and successors, to Acts of Parliament (perhaps he knew not what Acts, certainly his successors knew not) *enjoining* the Solemn League and Covenant, and *fully establishing* Presbyterian Government, &c. This part of the condition too Seceders here approve, and so declare it their judgment, that all kings should be obliged, and should fulfil the obligation to enjoin, as a prince, with his Parliament, the Covenant, and to enforce, as a prince, the injunction: to concur, as a prince, in the full Parliamentary establishment of religion, and, as a prince, to execute that establishment. Such are the qualifications required, in the judgment of

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* Solemn League, Art. 2.

the testimony, of the first officer of the state. And such, or similar, it reckons proper to be required in all who enjoy inferior places of power and trust.

The approbation of the above Act seems, of itself, sufficient to bind on the Secession-Testimony, a charge of the approbation of intolerant principles, especially when taken as connected with the other matters approved as steps of Reformation. It is true indeed, the Testimony, p. 62. grants that some things might be defective, or wrong, in the chief reforming period; but surely such parts as are mentioned with express approbation, cannot be ranked among those things which are confessed to be wrong. In this same Q. 5. of Formula, the answerer declares his disapprobation of the several steps of defection, condemned in the Testimony, with the grounds of condemnation stated in it, p. 65. The giving up of the *civil securities and ratifications* of the work of Reformation is condemned, p. 66. The toleration of sectarians, by Oliver Cromwell, is condemned as *introducing laxness in principle and practice; and paving a way for general apostacy*. This toleration is condemned, not because flowing from civil authority, not because it endangered the civil rights of men; but because it took off the restraints on profession which the Covenants had imposed.

In pages 82. and seq. the toleration by James II. 1686, is condemned, not merely because it rested on his supremacy, but because it *abrogated and pulled down the Penal Statutes*, those *hedges* of Reformation; and because, June 1687—"All penal and sanguinary laws, made against any for non-conformity to the religion established by law—or the exercise of their respective religious rites and ceremonies, are stopped, suspended and disabled, and a liberty is granted to all the subjects, to wor-
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Episcopals in Scotland, in the use of the English Liturgy 1712, by which, magistrates were prohibited, under pain of a fine, from disturbing, or forcibly interrupting public worship, is condemned, p. 94, 95, as "An almost boundless toleration, by which the government and discipline of the Church were exceedingly weakened, and a wide door opened for laxness in principles.—Tolerations of this kind are contrary to the word of God, and to the principles of this Church. [Conf. 20, 4. 23, 3,] and the answer to the question in the Larger Catechism, *What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?*—This boundless toleration is a stroke and judgment on this land."

Here the Secession-Testimony evidently teaches, That the discipline of the Church, against *Dissenters*, ought to be supported by the *coercive power* of the civil ruler: And if this be withdrawn, said discipline is sinfully weakened.—That the opening a wide door *for laxness in principle*, by withdrawing the same coercive power, is a sin and heavy judgment on a land.—That Conf. 20. 4. and 23, 3. and Larger Cat. 109. do indeed stand opposed to what is now called the doctrine of religious liberty.—That the granting of the enjoyment of worship, is sinful; and liberty of worship in a nation, a judgment. These erroneous points however, were, according to the obvious meaning of the words, approved in an implicit answer to Q. 5. of Formula, in the Ordination Vows.

A similar approbation is given of a passage, p. 144, where it is lamented, "Though Popish errors and delusions abound more and more, and the abominable idolatry of the *mass*, is *openly frequented* in many corners of the land; yet, no proper nor *effectual* remedies are employed against this growing evil: And particularly, Church-discipline is not
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duly exercised against Papists, according to former laudable acts and constitutions of this Church." Was it then, indeed, the opinion of the first Seceders, that a Presbyterian Church ought to exercise discipline against *Papists*, so as *effectually* to prevent them from *openly frequenting mass*; and that those Acts which employed the coercive aid of the civil power, for such a purpose, were indeed *laudable*? So the Testimony teaches.

Much more, to the same purpose, might be extracted from this Testimony; but what has been adduced, will be to some readers more than sufficient for fixing the charge of an intolerant tendency on it, and the charge of virtually approving intolerant doctrine on those who, in a solemn vow, profess, as is done in this fifth question of the Formula. The same point seems to be proved, with sufficient evidence, from the consideration of the other questions already stated.

It is indeed alleged; that this charge is obviated by Q. 11. of the same Formula; but how very void of foundation this allegation is, will appear from the question itself, which is, "Are you satisfied with, and do you purpose to adhere to, and maintain the principles, about the present Civil Government—which are declared, and maintained, in the Associate Presbytery's Answers to Mr. Nairn's reasons of dissent, with the defence thereto subjoined?"*

Now, either this question *does*, or *does not*, accord with the doctrine already shewn to be involved in

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* The design of the paper here referred to was laudable. In it, Seceders vindicate their conduct, in their subjection to the lawful commands of the Civil Ruler, though not a Covenanter, nor possessed of such qualifications as the Covenants required; and evince its propriety. Against this view of the paper I have no objection.

in some of the preceding questions. If it does not so accord, the Formula, taken as one engagement, is, in part, self-contradictory; and one part of the Solemn Vow inconsistent with others. This, however, would be mending the matter at too great expence, and so will not be granted. But, if it be not granted, it must appear that whatever has been truly charged on the other parts of the Formula, will remain valid, notwithstanding this question. Indeed, by examining the answers to which the question refers us, we find the same intolerant doctrine involved, or approved, though, in the same answers some of its native inferences are indeed condemned. P. 274, "The Presbytery acknowledge—that the *profession*, defence, and maintenance of the true religion in doctrine, worship, discipline, and Presbyterian Church government, agreeable unto, and founded on the word of God—was *received* by the fundamental constitution of the civil government in reforming periods; which *deed of constitution* in all moral respects, is morally unalterable,—because of its *agreeableness* to the Divine will revealed in the word." Whoever cannot discern here, a plain approbation of a *legal uniformity*, which may *secure*, by the civil arm, the maintenance of the *profession* of what is termed the true religion, seems unwilling to be convinced. We have already seen, however, that such uniformity cannot be secured without intolerance.

Farther, we have seen that the National Covenant and Solemn League were indeed intolerant in their nature and use. But in these answers, p. 268, we find, "The Presbytery has not *the least objection* to the *old form* of our Covenants; as very suitable unto the time wherein they were framed," &c. And, upon the whole, Covenanting, as practised by the

the first Seceders, "Is a plain and express renovation of the whole *matter* and *meaning* of our Covenants, in an accommodation to our circumstances." Thus then, as far as circumstances allow, there is a renovation of all the parts (intolerant and otherwise) of the Covenants, and an approbation of the whole. Again, p. 282, we find the imposition of the coronation oath approved, by which the king was bound to *allow* and *prosecute the ends* of the Covenants. Again, p. 287, "A wide door was opened to error and profanity, by an almost boundless toleration."

But it would be tedious and improper to cite every passage which tends to show that these answers do involve the erroneous doctrine in question. We may attend to that one passage on which the greatest dependence for obviating the charge is laid. It is in the Display, page 311.

"The public good of outward and common order, in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with magistracy can propose in a sole respect unto that office. And as in prosecuting this end civilly, according to their office, it is only over mens good and evil works that they can have any inspection; so, it is only over these which they must needs take cognizance of, for the said public good; while, at the same time, their doing so must be in such a manner, and proceed so far allenarly, as is requisite for that end; without assuming any lordship directly over men's consciences, or making any encroachment upon the special privileges and business of the Church. And moreover, as the whole institution and end of their office are cut out by, and lie within the compass of natural principles, it were absurd to suppose that there could, or ought to be any exercise thereof to its end, in the foresaid circumstances,

circumstances, but what can be argued for, and defended from natural principles: *as indeed, there is nothing especially allotted and allowed unto magistrates, by the word of God, and the Confessions of the reformed churches, but what can be so.*" Were the former part of this quotation, down to what is printed in Italics, to stand alone, though there is in it a cautiousness of expression, which might lead to suspect a difference of sentiment on the subject, among those who were concerned in framing these answers; yet it might stand for a pretty unexceptionable declaration of some of the leading principles of religious liberty. This part, however, cannot be fairly taken alone, but must be taken along with that part which is printed in Italics: for by none of the rules of interpretation are we at liberty to disjoin one part of the same sentence from another, for supporting our favourite hypothesis. Yet, unless we were thus to disjoin the parts of the same sentence, all that can be gathered from the above quotation is, that what is allotted and allowed to the magistrate, by the Confessions of the reformed churches, such as, *That it is his duty, and by his coronation oath, he ought to be bound to proceed, by his civil power, against such as publish opinions, or maintain practices concerning faith or worship, contrary to the known principles of Christianity, or to the power of godliness*. Also, to take order, that unity be preserved in the Church, and that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed†.*—That all these offices, and others similar, allotted and allowed him by the Confessions of the reformed churches, may be argued for

* Con. 20. 4.

† Con. 23. 3.

for, and defended from, as they lie within, the compass of natural principles: and so that they do indeed belong to the duty of the civil magistrate. This is the very intolerant principle all along complained of; and hence the Answers to Mr. Nairn, and particularly this passage in them, are of no use for obviating the charge of a spirit of intolerance, on that system of adherence to the covenanted Reformation, which the first Seceders adopted.

We have indeed, in the above quotation, a sad instance of the degree of impropriety into which very godly and wise men (for such the first Seceders must be thought) may be led by their attachment to principles once received. It seems to have been a principle among them, that the *standards are inviolable*: also, that *verbal uniformity in profession is indispensable*. Now, though it is indicated in the above passage, not obscurely, and more clearly elsewhere, that there were different or opposite sentiments on the subject among them; yet they found means to use a form of expression on the same subject, in which both parties could concur. For such a concurrence I cannot probably account otherwise than by supposing (not asserting) that each party rested on that part of the form which expressed its own sentiment; and supposed that the other part must bend to it in the interpretation. Thus, in agreeing on the passage quoted, the party best informed as to religious liberty, might acquiesce in the part of the passage last quoted, which is printed in Roman characters, as the key of interpretation to the whole. The party again which agreed in sentiment with the standards, might acquiesce in that part which is marked in Italics, as the key to the whole, and so concur.

It is, perhaps, in some such way as this, that persons often adhere to forms by lump; the parts of which are inconsistent among themselves, and
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many parts inconsistent with the professed adherer's real sentiments. Such adherence or concurrence, however, can serve no good purpose. By it persons only attain to a convenient way of mutually deceiving themselves, or each other, or the world; of frustrating the only good end of any such adherence, and sapping the foundations of mutual trust in a church. But to return from this digression and anticipation.

Besides the examples given, others might be adduced to prove, that even in the Answers to Mr. Nairn, the error in question is to be found. The same error, the discerning reader might discover in the mode of covenanting, which has been approved and practised by Seceders. Let it, however, suffice to have proved, that, *The adherence to public forms, required of candidates for license and ordination among Antiburgher-Seceders, did really, according to that plain obvious meaning of words which is necessary in every oath and vow, involve and contain an approbation of that intolerant principle, viz. That there ought to be in a nation, a national legal uniformity in religion, ordained and enforced by civil laws and their sanctions; and other doctrine connected with the same.*

And that there is here no misrepresentation, will appear, if we consider the writings of those individuals who were concerned in composing the public forms, and the form of adherence to them.

Of the sentiments of these, the reader may find a sample in Mr. Wilson's Defence of the Reformation Principles, page 299, 300, 302, 317, 319, *et alibi*. He will find samples to nearly the same purpose in different parts of Appendix 3d, to the Display of the Secession-Testimony by Mr. Gibb; though he was a much warmer friend to religious liberty than many of his brethren. He may observe,

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to the same purpose, in England's Alarm, by Mr. Mr. Moncrieff. But we shall not detain the reader with quotations from these or other writings to this purpose.

Having, perhaps, more than sufficiently proved, from the public forms used among Antiburgher-Seceders, and their adherence to these forms, that they were justly chargeable with approving the erroneous doctrine, and iniquitous practice, of a national uniformity in the profession of religion, enjoined by civil law. I may state very shortly, that the same charge applies with equal, or greater force to their Burgher brethren.

This appears clearly from their adherence, till lately, to the same judicial Act and Testimony adhered to by the other party; the erroneous doctrine of which, on the point in question, has been already considered. It appears, also, from their constant assertion, that they are not dissenters from, but true partizans and friends of the religion authorized by law in Scotland, and steady adherents to it. That they alone, and not the pretended National Church, are observing the true legally authorized religion.

It appears from their defence of the religious clause of the Burghers-oath, in which, on the same foundation, though they be, and design to abide, separate from the Judicatories of the National Church, they contend a Seceder may swear as follows: "I protest before God and your Lordships, that I profess and allow, with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof: I shall abide thereat and defend the same to my life's end."† This, according to them, is no more than swearing that the person is a sincere Seceder, and intends to remain so all the days of his life. I need not inquire whether their Lordships understand

† Those who reckon their own religion to be the only one

understand this clause of the oath in the same sense. But here is certainly an approbation of the authorizing by law a national religion. The use of such an oath, indeed, is a part of the enforcement of a national uniformity in religion; and to vindicate such use of the oath, as these Seceders have done, is an approbation of this enforcement of uniformity. These observations, and many more, will readily occur to any one who will take the trouble of examining the re-exhibition of the Secession-Testimony, "published by order of the Associate Synod," 1779.* But the error appears most obviously in the Appendix. Here several pieces of sinful conduct are charged on the General Assembly. Among others, that they "have persevered in dismissing from their bar, without adequate censure, such of their members as were impeached of *palpable and gross errors*; as is evident from the following instances."—What were some of these *gross errors*?

Mr. John Glas—taught, and publicly asserted, "That the kingdom of Israel was of an ecclesiastical nature:—That our Covenants, National and Solemn League, were an unwarrantable confounding and blending of Church and State with one another:—That the civil magistrate hath no more power in ecclesiastical matters, than the meanest private Christian."†

Dr. William Wishart asserted and published—
"That the civil magistrate hath no power to punish heresies of any kind; but, that his jurisdiction reacheth to those crimes only, which are committed against the state: and, that all men ought to have a liberty to speak and write as they please; provided

authorized by law; and swear to abide by it, as so authorized, are certainly to be reckoned friends to legal establishments of religion.

* See title page

† Page 168.

provided their sentiments do not endanger the welfare of civil society." *

These sentiments, reader, the Burgher Associate Synod, in 1779, reckoned *palpable and gross errors*. They must then hold the opposite as true. They must hold it true, for example, *That the civil Magistrate hath power to punish heresies:—that his jurisdiction reacheth to other crimes besides those which are committed against the State: and that all men ought not to have a liberty to write and speak as they please, even though their sentiments do not endanger the welfare of civil society: that all the blending and confounding of the church and the state with one another, to be found in the National Covenant and Solemn League, were warrantable: that the civil magistrate hath, even in ecclesiastical matters, a superiority of power*. In the same spirit we find, p. 181, a condemnation of tolerations, and from the same book much more to the same purpose might be adduced. Quite agreeable, also, are the sentiments published by Mr. Brown of Haddington, in his letters on toleration throughout. Such is the doctrine taught in the latest publications of general authority among this party of Seceders: and they do not even soften the matter as their brethren do, by a question in their Formula, referring to the answers to Mr. Nairn.

Although, however, the error in question makes so great a figure in the forms which, till lately, constituted the public profession of both parties of Seceders, it would be doing great injury to the individuals of either party, to suppose the sentiments of them all tainted with the same error. Many of both parties have, of late†, seen reason to deviate

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• Page 169.

† Charity forbids to suppose that this error was observed to be such, at the time of publishing either the Testimony, or the Re-exhibition, or long before an alteration was desired.

in their opinion from the forms on this point, and to adopt the condemned sentiments of Mr. Glas and Dr. Wisheart, above quoted, believing with the former, "That the kingdom of Israel was of an ecclesiastical nature:" and so, that the examples under the Old Testament, of magistrates punishing persons for idolatry and blasphemy, ought not to be imitated under the gospel; nor such imitation approved by the church, therefore, "That our Covenants, National and Solemn League, *were* an unwarrantable confounding and blending of church and state,"—and, "That the civil magistrate hath no more power in ecclesiastical matters than the meanest Christian:" and with the latter, "That the civil magistrate hath no power to punish heresies of any kind; but that his jurisdiction reacheth to those crimes only, which are committed against the state; and that all men ought to have a liberty to speak and write as they please, provided their sentiments do not endanger the welfare of civil society." Such are the sentiments of many of those, who, not long ago, believed that the civil magistrate "hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that *unity* and peace be preserved in the church; that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, and all corruptions and abuses in worship or discipline prevented or reformed."—So that, by an happy increase of knowledge, they are come, after a great example, to *preach the faith which once they destroyed.*†

That such an increase of knowledge, and change of sentiment has really taken place, may be clearly evinced by the writings of ministers, both among the Antiburghers and Burghers. So early as the year 1771, Mr. Hall, a minister in London, of the latter party, in a pamphlet entitled, *An Impartial Survey*

† Gal. i. 23.

Survey; or, Tekel, wrote clearly on the subject. Speaking of the church of Scotland sitting down on the revolution establishment, he asks, "Could the church warrantably sit down on *any legal establishment* whatever, supposing it to have been as good and perfect as any human establishment could be? I deny it."—"A church built upon tradition, former reformation, acts of civil establishment, or any thing human, is not the church of Christ as far as she does so, but a building of men." And he wishes to see the "independence and constitution of the Christian church, explained and defended, upon principles that have no relation to the purity and propriety of any legal security by Parliament whatever."* "The utmost ambition of Christians," as to their concern with civil powers, "should be confined to this," that under them, "*They* may lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty."†

This author quotes a Mr. Graham, an Antiburgher minister, who had written to the same purpose before him. The same Mr. Graham, some time after, published a volume of some size, in condemnation of all legal establishments that ever have existed since the propagation of Christianity, and evincing the absurdity and perniciousness of the very principles of their constitution. This work abundantly proves, that this author's mind was changed, as we have said; while its favourable reception, proved the same thing, with respect to many of his own, and other parties.

Soon after this publication, an overture on the subject was formed, and brought in due course before the general Synod of the Antiburghers. This overture was to be an exception from, or explanation of, Conf. 20. 4. and 23. 3. Its sum is as follows:

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* Page 21.

† Page 17.

“ The right of private judgment in matters of religion, is the natural and common right of man, sacred and unalienable—as every man has a right to form, so (demeaning himself peaceably as a citizen) also, explicitly and openly to avow his sentiments, and associate with others for celebrating ordinances in his own way. The gospel abhors all methods of compulsion; so the civil magistrate, professing Christianity, has, in matters of religion, no more than a private judgment like the meanest of his subjects, and therefore, can have no right to step beyond the limits of that province, in the encouragement of even evangelical truth and holiness; nor in the discouragement of the opposite errors and corruptions.—The most godly civil magistrate may not bestow on the church as a body, nor upon her ministers or members, as individuals, however pure she, or holy they may be, any such favours or privileges, as may infringe on the just rights and privileges of those who may dissent from her:—Nor, may he positively punish any peaceable subjects, for holding, or teaching, what he, or the church of which he is a member shall judge to be heresy, error, or schism; for the sum of all competent to the civil magistrate, with respect to even the true church is, to protect her as a society, and her members as men and citizens, in the quiet enjoyment of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free.”

These sentiments meet the views of many Seceders. It was, however, impossible to reconcile them to the public forms, or to the adherence by which these forms were approved in the Secession.

Here then, was an obvious inconsistency between real sentiments, and public profession. The real sentiment was, “ Every person has a right peaceably to form, and also publicly to avow, his sentiments, however false; and worship accordingly in his own way.”

way." The public profession by solemn vow was, *For publishing such opinions, or maintaining such practices as are contrary to the known principles of Christianity, concerning faith, worship, or conversation; or to the power of godliness—persons may be called to account, and proceeded against—by the power of the civil magistrate.*

The sentiment was, "The civil magistrate, professing Christianity, has, in matters of religion, no more than a private judgment, like the meanest of his subjects; and therefore, can have no right to step beyond the limits of that province, in the encouragement of even evangelical truth and holiness, nor in the discouragement of the opposite errors and corruptions."

Profession. *The civil magistrate—hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church; that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruption in worship and discipline, prevented or reformed—all the ordinances of God duly settled and observed. He hath power to call Synods—and to provide that what is transacted at them, be according to the word of God.*

It were easy to multiply instances of contrast, by adducing passages from different parts of the Covenants, Act and Testimony, &c. similar to the two above quoted from the Conf. and opposing them to the different sentiments of the above overture. It seems pretty evident, that no person who approved the overture, could profess as in Formula, Q. 2. To "believe the *whole* doctrine contained in the Conf.—to be founded on, and agreeable to the word of God:" Nor, according to the other question, his adherence to the Covenants and Testimony, without *equivocation* and *mental reservation*.

These, however, are quite incongruous to the very nature of an *oath* and *vow*, and subversive of

the ends of a public profession; for, as we have already quoted, from an overture published by order of the Synod of Glasgow, "Confessions, Creeds and Catechisms" (if at all)—"are to be received, subscribed and adhered to, in their plain and obvious meaning; without equivocation or mental reservation: and, to subscribe, or profess our belief of articles, which we judge unscriptural, for the sake of peace or worldly advantage, is a most unpardonable outrage against Christian integrity and common honesty."

To avoid the practice of this unpardonable outrage; and also, that they might forsake error, Seceders of both parties, who were enlightened in the doctrine of religious liberty, were under an absolute necessity of changing either their public forms, or their mode of professing adherence to these forms, or to abandon such forms entirely.

This necessity might serve to justify both these parties in the changes they are meditating and making in their public profession; for surely, scarcely any change will produce worse than the habitual outrage of Christian sincerity and common honesty.

To illustrate the necessity of such a change, to urge it, and to vindicate that party who were then meditating it, the following pamphlet was intended, at its first publication, in September 1794. Its present re-publication may be useful for the same purposes still. It will apply, with a very few exceptions, equally to either party: and, though some retractsations may seem proper, yet, perhaps, somewhat will remain worthy the attention of either party, and of both the friends of change and its foes.

The pamphlet was entitled;

"A Candid Inquiry into some points of Public religion; or, Animadversions on Existing Circumstances among Antiburgher-Sceders.—By one of themselves."

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN one puts pen to paper, on the measures of his own party, he is expected to defend, without exception, every one of them; and he who deviates will need an apology; for he seems inconsistent, and a false friend. This conclusion is not always well founded. A true friend once had reason to say, *Am I—become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?* “But the truth ought not to be told in such manner: This is telling in *Gath*, and publishing in *Askelon*.” These words might have weight, were it not that nothing in a public religious profession can, or ought to be secret. The matters blamed in the following pages it is impossible to hide; and it seemed the most friendly office the writer could perform, to expose their malignity, that they may be relinquished. To the present manner he seemed limited in the performance of this office.

He is a real friend to the party; but so much the more earnestly laments existing abuses. Though he sees these, however, he is not at liberty to leave the communion, for two reasons: He cannot find another connection exempted from similar, or greater abuses; and he dare not exclude himself from communion with the Church of Christ. At any rate, before any step of separation ought to be taken, some attempt to obtain relief seems necessary. These remarks are intended as of that nature; and the manner chosen seemed best calculated for extensive application, and indeed the only one competent to a person in a private capacity. The subscription is omitted, not because the writer would fear to say
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all he has written, but because such an appearance would seem to some not suitable for him, and least his insignificance, real or supposed, should frustrate his design. (If the truth be told, no matter who tell it). If some things seem unguarded, or too strongly expressed, let the importance of the subject, and his concern in it, plead his apology. If any thing be exaggerated, let it be clearly pointed out, he will be happy to retract, and would rejoice in a demonstration that all his complaints are utterly groundless*. But whatever is true and important he expects will obtain cognizance.

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NOTES AND RETRACTATIONS.

* Such retraction accordingly is thought necessary in the republication, and so is offered in Notes as it has been previously, to those concerned, in a more private manner. Those things only are retracted, however, which seem to bear too hard on Seceders: others equally untenable, according to the new-ground taken in the sequel, are omitted. But the sequel will show that they are not, therefore, to be reckoned the author's present sentiments.

The following retractions were given, and are still to be understood, in connection with the following Propositions already illustrated, from the *full meaning* of which, nothing is intended to be retracted.

1st, "The Westminster Confession, 20, 4. 23, 3; the Larger Catechism, Q. 109; the Covenants, National and Solemn League, and Secession Act and Testimony, in different places, do contain doctrine which is erroneous and intolerant."

2d, "Seceders in their *ordinary* professions of adherence to said Confession, Catechism, Covenants and Testimony, at obtaining Ordination License, Baptism to Children, or accession to a Congregation, did (at the time of writing the tract in question) virtually adhere to said erroneous doctrine."

3d, "This error, some Seceders, both ministers and people, did, at the same time, know, and in their writings or conversation, declare to be such: others embraced it as truth."

4th, "Such of them as believed it true, were, nevertheless, chargeable, with holding and professing, in said adherence, a dangerous error."

5th,

Sanguine hopes arise from the review of our Testimony, at present in agitation. If any thing in these pages shall in any degree serve to guard the committee, who have the management of that matter, against attempting to *heal the wound slightly*, by applying to a mere palliative, or excite them to endeavour a radical cure, the writer will rejoice: and if any thing advanced shall serve to prevent divisions in the church, by reconciling ministers and others to such salutary alterations as may be proposed, his end will be attained. In the mean time, it seems necessary, till such alteration be attained, that the exercise of ministers and others be left more free; that a strict conformity to doubtful rules be dispensed

5th, "Such as knew the same to be error, and yet professed as above (2d,) were chargeable with abetting the same error, and hardening their brethren in the same; and, also, with much obvious inconsistency in their own religious conduct."

6th, "Such inconsistency and dissingenuity are an important evil. They ought not to be suffered in a church, but are a proper subject of animadversion."

To illustrate and enforce the above sentiments, the pamphlet was intended. So, as far as it does not exceed in statement or severity, a proper and due illustration of the same, no retraction is intended; but as far as it does exceed in either respect, so far a retraction is intended.

Several instances of such excess have occurred, and been pointed out to the observation of the author. In general,

1st, As the tract was anonymous, the sharp animadversions it contained, were the more liable to be reckoned those of an enemy; and the professions of friendship in the Preface and elsewhere, had a weaker claim to credit, than if the author had given his name. This was blameable, and might prevent the intended effect.

2d, An undue severity and asperity of diction, runs through many parts, which bears hard on the characters of ministers and others, and the proper candid apologies are not sufficiently kept in view.

3d, This apparent asperity and harshness was the more hurtful and culpable, that it was supported, in some instances, by rash inconsiderate statement and over-strained reasonings. Particular instances will be marked in the following Notes.

pensed with. This may be deemed disorderly; but it is better that order be sacrificed to conscience, than conscience to order; better the means give way to the end, than the end give way to what is at best but a mean; absurd, that means destructive of the end should be continued in use.

If this inquiry be reckoned by some improper, and the writer arrogant, he satisfies himself in the sentiments contained in the following words: *When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said before them all—Why?—Will ye speak wickedly for God? Will ye talk deceitfully for him? Our rejoicing ought to be this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world. We should not be as many who deal deceitfully with the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, should speak in Christ. Wherefore, laying aside—all guile—let us speak the truth every one to his brother. Let us purge out the old leaven, and—Stand, having our loins girt about with truth.*

A

CANDID INQUIRY, &c.

QUERY I.

AN important question, requiring an affirmative answer, is, Whether it be the duty of individuals and societies, in their religious exercises, to cultivate universally, strict simplicity and godly sincerity?—To this the Holy Ghost answers most clearly in the affirmative. Those who speak with a double heart and flattering lips, are the wicked. He who has a good prospect of enjoying God in perfection, is one who speaketh the truth in his heart. This is true of societies, as well as of persons in a religious character. Religion immediately respects Deity; but we must not lie for God: we must not speak deceitfully even for him. In simplicity and godly sincerity, says an eminent Apostle, we had our conversation among you.

A Jesuit * indeed, will argue, that for the advancing of religion, it is lawful for him to perpetrate what would otherwise be unlawful. I am not

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writing

* Here a provoking comparison seems to be insinuated, tending to irritate, and not to persuade.

writing for Jesuits, but for those who profess to be witnesses for Christ, to buy the truth and not to sell it, to be valiant for the truth upon the earth, to confess Christ and all his ways before men. When, therefore, it is inquired, Whether integrity, simplicity, and godly sincerity, ought to characterize our religious conduct, hesitation must give way to undoubted assent.

QUERY 2. Ought not a religious Testimony to be impartial in the choice of its objects; and is not its proper object, truth or error as such, sin or duty because such? The declared motive of a Testimony is zeal for the glory of God, and against every thing which tends to dishonour him. Every revealed truth of religion is important, and every opposing error, dangerous; all sin is to be opposed, all duty promoted. The circumstances which direct a Testimony against particular sins or errors, and in favour of particular truths or duties, must be their importance, prevalence, danger, benefit, or the knowledge concerning them already attained by the testifier. When, therefore, known truths, of equal importance, are equally opposed, they have equally a claim for testimony; when known errors, of equal malignity, are equally propagated, they equally call for opposing testimony. The same is true also with respect to sin and duty in conduct. Says the Psalmist, I love thy law; but I hate *every* false and wicked way. I love whatever is contained in thy law: all thy word hath been true and sure from the beginning. I hate every false and wicked way, because false and wicked. So says every true Christian; so says every religious society, if suitably exercised: and, accordingly, the Testimony for truth and virtue, against error and iniquity, will be impartial, and extensive as knowledge,

QUERY

QUERY 3. Whether or not is the Secession Testimony now exhibiting to the world partial and defective? To those who would be faithful, this is an important question; and it would be desirable if we could answer in the negative. I fear, however, the opposite is true. Our Testimony is justly entitled, *A Testimony for a Covenanted Reformation, and against Defection from the same in former and present times.* If this title be just, our Testimony must be defective. Here that Reformation is set up as the standard of perfection:* yet certainly there might be, and there was something worth attainment, and yet unattained in It. Some defection or sin not pointed against It, may call for cognizance. Our Testimony implies in its title, That the Reformation in question, embraced whatever is worth testifying for, or against; and that it contained nothing exceptionable or wrong.

It must be granted that every testimony will be defective. It cannot properly extend farther than the knowledge of the testifier, and this knowledge is always defective. It is scarcely probable that our fathers, compilers of the Testimony, saw no flaws in the Reformation; yet granting they did not, as circumstances alter cases, we now can clearly see, that in that Reformation there was much defect, and a large quantity of impropriety; and so, whatever might be the case of our forefathers, as to us the Testimony is partial and defective. Even supposing the Reformation a perfect business, and the Testimony at its first exhibition also perfect, it could not, in the course of things, abide so. New errors and abuses might arise: they have arisen; and these need cognizance equally with those of
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* This reasoning is strained; as it is unfair thus to conclude from the general terms of a title-page.

earlier origin, require equally as the former, a Testimony; and if they be omitted, the Testimony must be defective.

Farther, our Testimony embraces the doctrines and recorded practices of our Reformers as one Whole: as we testify for them, without stating any exception, our Testimony must be thus understood by the world. Now, it is very possible there might be some evils which required a special Testimony against them, and yet have escaped the notice of our godly reformers; but as knowledge is progressive, and as we are accountable for Our knowledge; if it be evident, that something requiring distinct testimony was really omitted in the Reformation of our forefathers; that something calling for assertion was neglected, or something requiring opposition and condemnation was connived at or homologated; our Testimony must appear Defective and Partial. This however may appear with additional evidence in our next inquiry.

QUERY 4. Is not our Testimony in many instances foreign and misapplied?

A Testimony is misapplied, or impertinent, if it dwell more on matters of less, than on those of greater importance. Matters of testimony, existing in the present time, must be more important than those existing in past. In the present time we live; in it we are to perform the duties of our station and relations; the matters of error and sin which occur in our own days, and in our own observation, require our chief attention: past periods are to have some, but not the whole, nor the chief regard.

We cannot deny that our Testimony dwells chiefly on antiquities, and allusions to occurrences long past. This must indeed be the case with every written Testimony of long standing, and not frequently reviewed:

reviewed: in it, the past and more early will occupy the place due to what is present or recent. The past obtains thus not only an unjust preference to the present; but often monopolizes the whole attention, and excludes it almost entirely from its due regard. Even the limited powers of the mind prevent the strictest attention to both; and thus the more important is overlooked.

This is a growing evil. If we preserve, in the written Testimony, all the past, and also insert the recent occurrences as they happen; it would soon become so voluminous, that, to digest it in the manner requisite to a conscientious profession, would be difficult, if not impossible. At least, supposing, as is now the case, that the acknowledgment of the Testimony, is a term of communion, and this acknowledgment never to be made but in exercise of judgment and conscience (as certainly ought to be the case;) a lifetime would be too short to attain an adequate acquaintance with the Testimony, though its application to practice were out of the question. There is perhaps too much of this at present the case. Indeed, every written Testimony of long standing, and referring to particulars, must be in some degree foreign; and those who make it the standard of their public profession, must seem to swallow the camel, while they strain at the gnat.

This imperfection of our Testimony, with respect to the present time, arises from its temporary, local, and personal nature. To an impartial reader, it must appear calculated only, or chiefly, for the meridian of Scotland. It is indeed doubtful, whether the first Seceders had their views sufficiently extended beyond the limits of their own country. Our ideas seem to have been cramped by modes familiar, and which existed at home. This might not pre-

vent the propriety of the Testimony when first exhibited; or its pertinency in the view of those acquainted with the places, persons, and particular occurrences mentioned. Ecclesiastical proceedings as to Messrs. Simpson and Campbell, with all their minutiae, were then recent, and in memory; the act concerning Captain Porteous could then be better judged of; the truth concerning a Mr. Nimmo, an affair at Cambuslang, &c. could then be more easily attained, without danger of misrepresentation: All these then might be proper examples of evils testified against, and were fitted to convince the mind. Now, however, they are less pertinent. It is unprofitable, or hurtful, to impose upon one desiring to become a Seceder, the task of deciding in these matters: Yet, supposing his testimony rational, he must either so decide, or proceed upon the credit of predecessors (some of whom might be under the influence of prejudice) or else accede to the Testimony at random. To continue these references seems the less necessary, as a woful abundance of similar matter at present exhibits itself full in our view.

QUERY 5. It may be proper to inquire, Whether our Testimony do not embrace some points *materially wrong*? As far as a religious Testimony is seen to be partial and defective, it is blameable, and needs amendment. The same is necessary, if it be misapplied, and foreign; but much more so, if it be in any point favourable to moral evil, to the existence or continuance of abuse. The title of our public Testimony avows, that we approve of the Reformation, Covenants, and Westminster Confession. This avowal must be understood as total and unlimited,*
for

* The same impropriety observed in the last note occurs here. The reasoning is unfair: for though no particular instance of impropriety, in the Reformation, be mentioned in the Testimony, there is a general confession, after the approving part, that there might be some.

for while no exceptions are stated, and a general approbation declared, every single point comes in for its share of the approbation, equally with every other; and if any one point be alleged not included, there is the same, or equal reason, to exclude every other.

The matters thus totally approved, however, involve the approbation and homologating of a wicked junction of Church and State. Such a junction, upon strict scrutiny, cannot be vindicated from some degree of implicated blasphemy; besides that, it is injurious to men. If consistent with itself, it must raise a creature to that respect and observance, which is the prerogative of the Deity. It generally involves also a certain degree of persecution or oppression. Governors, as such, have nothing to bestow on any class of subjects, except what is levied from the mass. To assess the mass, in favour of any class, seems like plundering the whole to aggrandize a few: it seems evidently unjust, and a wrong from which the faithful ought to keep free. Besides, civil interposition in behalf of religion, except to defend rights natural and common to all, cannot be of importance for its advancement. Temporal favour, bestowed on a particular sect of religionists, seems intended to render that sect more respectable and numerous. If the favour has not this effect, it is in a great measure useless, and as far as the mere temporal favour has this effect, it has a tendency to mar true religion. He who accedes to the party from this consideration, appears under the influence, not of the love of the Father, but of love to this world. At the same time, other parties suffer a glaring injustice. Every person thus suffers, who, on account of any thing in his character purely religious, and justly cognizable by God alone, is subjected to temporal hardship, or deprived of tempo-
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ral advantage. One of these, or both, seems necessary to a state-religion; at least has occurred in every state-religion which has hitherto appeared. On this point it is not necessary to insist. Those for whom chiefly I write, Seceders*, and especially their religious instructors, have, in general, a clear conviction of the unreasonableness, iniquity, and pernicious tendency of any such alliance between Church and State.

Such alliance is, however, evidently acknowledged, with approbation, in the Covenants and Confession for which we profess to testify. This cannot possibly be denied. As to Covenants, the very title *National Covenant*, and the numerous acts of parliament to which appeal is made, are for a thousand proofs. To the Solemn League, Confession, and Catechisms, acts of parliament are prefixed, and there is a preliminary declaration, that by these acts the forms are ratified and established. Even without these, indeed, the truth could be discerned in the forms themselves.

What was thus wrong in these forms, is practically homologated, and even adopted by us, in our public Testimony. As far as we testify for these forms, without disclaiming any part as objectionable, we testify for every part, and for every part alike. But even though nothing were intrinsically wrong in these forms, or in our public Testimony to them; yet, in present circumstances, we could not be blameless in such an adherence. While (as is the case) on the topic of religious liberty, a number, perhaps the majority of ministers and people, are of opinions contrary to those expressed in these forms, it is evidently wrong for them to maintain such a Testimony†. Our

* So far as the author's acquaintance extended, this was the case, but this assertion was too unlimited.

† Unless it could be proved, that this inconsistency was observed and known by such ministers and people, the charge is too severe.

Our Seceding fathers, it is confessed, had not their views of religious liberty sufficiently enlarged. In compiling the Testimony, they used expressions correspondent to their own ideas. It seems unreasonable and inconsistent, that we, whose ideas on this subject are different or contrary, should publish our Testimony to the world in the same expressions. Our Testimony will and must be received in the world in the native sense of the expressions, and not according to any far-fetched gloss we may put on them. While we endeavour to impose such glosses on the public, we expose ourselves to ridicule. If we allow men to discover our sentiments from our written Testimony, we keep them in the dark. If the discovery is to be made, by a comparison of this Testimony with our conversation or sermons, the result must be, that we are inconsistent and self-contradictory.

No reproach on our worthy reformers is here intended, far less on those who engaged in testifying against the insufferable tyranny and corruption of the established Church. I approve their intentions, and wish to bless God for the good he then did by them. At the same time, I can suppose that they saw but in part, and were defective in execution. Themselves never presumed on perfection, nor dreamed of immutability; and, perhaps, never that their successors would lazily sit down at that point to which they had attained. In such a stop, we differ from all reformers, and violate our engagements to reformation. It is the character of reformers to proceed. If, though comparatively dwarfs in talents or religious zeal, yet, helped by the labours, and raised on the gigantic shoulders of our godly predecessors, we discover what was hidden from them, we ought to be thankful for the advantage, and to improve it by imitating whatever is blameless in
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their conduct. In their practice, in the very act of seceding, we find a practical opposition to Church and State alliance; in their separate communion, they gave relief against many of its pernicious effects; though in the public forms, through fear, or ignorance, or inadvertency, they continued to avow and approve. But how far we come short of an honest disposition to prosecute reformation, will appear when we examine our present mode of exhibiting to the world our religious Testimony.

QUERY 6. Is our conduct, in acceding to the Testimony, consistent with simplicity and godly sincerity, with that integrity which true Christianity requires?

When a person, wearied with tyranny and domination in an established Church, unable to find the sincere milk of the word administered, or the ordinances and institutions of Christ duly observed; offended with the want of zeal and inconsistency in various kinds of Dissenters, wishes to become a Seceder, he signifies his intention to the Session. He is, or ought to be, first instructed, to get acquainted with the Confession, Catechisms, and Act and Testimony. When he can declare that he has considered these, his approbation of them is required; and this approbation must be professed before the Session. Persons, who think for themselves, often demur at this; yet, convinced of the importance of being in some church-communion, and in the purest they can find; they often make an effort, and choose what they think the less evil. In such a case, it may be often a question, Whether the person does actually approve of every thing in this Confession, Catechisms, or Testimony. Nay, perhaps, many members of the Session, or the minister himself, may disapprove of some things in them. Possibly the acceder, or some of the Session, may be able to discern

discern in some of these standards inconsistency. Approbation of what is wrong, a testifying against what is harmless or proper, may be discovered; and yet the Session requires, and the acceder gives his approbation of the whole, without stating one exception. This profession of approbation is the condition of admission into communion. In this general profession, every part of the standards is equally included. All the articles of the Confession are acknowledged as true; whatever the Testimony approves as good; every particular condemned is disclaimed. The acceder may have his exceptions; but in his accession he indulges a mental reservation with respect to them. His public profession embraces equally these, as those parts he with his heart avows. They are therefore, as far as profession ascertains matters, as certainly to be esteemed his principles, as any other articles in his creed. Often, however, they are not in reality a part of his belief; not believed by the Session; not even by the minister who presides at the accession*.

When this is the case, there seems to be a disagreeable absence of open integrity. It seems scarcely defensible, to require and receive such a profession, and scarcely conscientious to give it: especially if it be considered, that ministers, sessions, and acceders, receive and give such profession in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a solemn manner, as in the presence of God, who cannot be deceived.

These considerations seem to weigh much with many godly persons, who approve of us for holding Testimony, though they approve not every article of that Testimony; who prize the sincere milk of the word, and approve of our strict scriptural discipline

* This sentence, and what precedes in the same Query, are given as the only probable account of the acceder's conduct, considering his own opinion, and that of the Minister and Session-members. The assertion, however, is unguarded.

cipline. Many of these attend regularly to hear the gospel, but cannot swallow the whole profession. Some, however, are, as it were, constrained, by a sense of duty, to present their children for baptism, to join in some communion, or, urged by a regard of the command of their dying Lord, to communicate. At such a crisis, a person of conscience is often in a strait between his objections, and his desire to join. Some give way to their objections, and join with a party who are less difficult in their preliminaries, and less agreeable in the rest of their profession and practice. Others act over the belly of their objections, and accept the Testimony, as a mixture of sweet and bitter. The consideration, that the making of this profession is soon over, and that afterwards the person is in agreeable connections, has here considerable weight. It is true, that remaining in the communion is, virtually, a continuance of the profession; but as this is less explicit, so it is less attended to by persons concerned. It most frequently happens, however, that such persons have occasion to present their children in baptism, and then the explicit declaration of profession is again necessary*.

QUERY 7. Whether integrity and truth are the characteristics of this transaction? When a parent applies for baptism to his child, presents it, and obtains the administration of that ordinance; is there no trespass against simplicity and godly sincerity in the whole transaction? Are the public declarations made, the expression of the thoughts of the heart?

Here the profession is public: it is solemn. What is declared, is before God and many witnesses of mankind. Previous to the administration, the parent converses with the minister in private, gives cognizance

* This paragraph also, is an inference from the known opinions of the persons making profession, compared with their conduct, on the occasions mentioned. The inference seems native; but it ought to have been stated more explicitly as an inference.

cognizance of his principles, of his knowledge, of his church-membership. In this conversation he, perhaps, states some objections to the public profession about to be required, and the minister either attempts to remove them, or allows their validity. In private, the minister may concede, that there are some things exceptionable in the public forms; but he in general will rather attempt to explain away the exceptionableness. Such explanation is often used in these cases; but is little more satisfactory, than that offered to prove, that one may subscribe the 39 Articles though he be an Arian or Socinian; or to prove the consistency of a Seceder, when he swears the Burgefs Oath. But this explication, lame as it may be, is not allowed in public. Indeed, it perhaps is as well to be private. In public, the parent, after professing his desire, and in this profession signifying his belief of what is the design of baptism, in our general practice, professes his faith, and avows his obligation to duty.

In the profession of his faith, he, among other things, avows the Westminster Confession to be founded on the word of God, and to be the confession of his faith. And this avowal makes no distinction between articles more or less important, more or less proper: and far less can it possibly bear, that the person disbelieves any part of the whole. In the same manner, he avows his approbation of the System of Discipline, Form of Church-government, and Directory for Worship. He also avows his approbation of the Act and Testimony, and this approbation includes in it an unlimited approbation of the Covenanted Reformation*. The person approves of the Testimony, as it approves of the Reformation. Nay, he is often required to avow his belief, that

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* See note on Query 3d.

the Covenants are binding on latest posterity. And here also there is no limitation, not the least supposition, that there may be somewhat improper in these forms. (I have heard a minister, I believe without previous notice, require a parent, publicly to profess his belief of the present reasonableness of covenanting as practised among Seceders; and the same minister declare, that such an acknowledgment was a term of communion among Seceders. I believe *he* was mistaken. I am sure he was singular, as to many of his brethren; and so consider only general practice.)

By the public professions above mentioned, any impartial observer, who would form his estimate of the creed of the minister, or parent, must judge, that neither has any objection to the least matter in the whole Reformation, Confession, Catechisms, or Testimony. The profession now made, cannot fairly be interpreted into any other meaning, than an entire approbation of every thing mentioned as approved. The belief of one God, that the Scriptures are the word of God, &c. are not more explicitly declared, than the acknowledgment of the Confession, as the confession of the person's own faith. Yet, while this profession is so unlimited, it is often true, that the minister who publicly receives and approves this profession, and the person who offers it, and perhaps the more thinking part of the congregation, do not approve of these forms entirely; but are convinced that the Covenanted Reformation was in some respects wrong; that some parts of both Confession and Testimony are exceptionable. Now, in such circumstances, where is the sincerity? What is the use of such unlimited profession? As a transaction of worship, is it not like a mocking of God? Is there not here a loud
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call for change? But laying aside the religious view; to continue this unlimited approbation of every thing in the mean time, while the supreme court has under consideration, an overture, complaining, that many things are wrong, and craving amendment*. How inconsistent is the continuation of the practice?

Some members of Synod, have been long impressed with a strong disapprobation of an alliance between church and state. Many, from pulpit or press, have exposed the wickedness and absurdity of such an alliance. At the same time, these cannot but discern that such an alliance figured greatly in the Reformation. It is evident the transaction of covenanting, as far as it deserves to be characterized national, was in a great measure intended and used as a political engine. In giving unlimited Testimony for the Reformation, members of Synod saw that there was an unavoidable homologating of this alliance. And indeed the whole tenor of the testimony bewrays this. Some particular parts express it pretty plainly. Ministers, to whom this matter appeared evident, and an important evil, have wished to get rid of it, and have therefore proposed an overture of alteration. The final issue, in consequence, is not yet fully known; but that, while such a case is pending, we should insist on the same implicit and unlimited avowal of entire approbation, seems inconsistent and unaccountable. Perhaps the same will appear in some degree true, if we enquire,

QUERY 8. Whether our conduct in Covenanting, as this is transacted among us, be marked with integrity, candour, and reason? And whether it be
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* This overture did not expressly complain that any thing was improper in the forms, but being opposite to these forms, and craving a change, it seemed to suppose something wrong.

most conducive to the good of the church, and edification of her members?

Covenanting is, to the world, the most distinguishing and prominent feature of our communion. The transaction itself is most solemn. In this especially, it would be desirable to have our doctrine clear and consistent, and our practice unexceptionable.

Whether covenanting be a duty incumbent on Christians, I dispute not: To a candid mind the matter seems evident. As we are creatures dependent on God for every thing, and possessing all our enjoyments from him, it is certainly our duty, in our hearts to be entirely devoted to his service: and if so, it is duty also, with the mouth to glorify God in expressing this devotedness. This is no more than an honest man expressing the best sentiments of his mind, and it amounts to the same thing as covenanting. If this be so evidently our duty as we are rational creatures, it is much more evidently so, and our obligation much stronger, as we are bought with a price. For the same reasons, social covenanting, in the most explicit manner, must appear evidently a duty. This is no more than the agreement of a number in the same dutiful exercise.

That personal covenanting is the duty of every adult Christian, and solemn social covenanting the duty of Christians in society, seems to me so evident as to need little demonstration; and if any be needed, it is abundantly given by our judicious writers who have vindicated the duty†.

But though the duty as to its matter be perfectly clear, it may be clogged with circumstances which will render it impracticable. If circumstances are annexed by the society, which cannot be innocently complied with by the individual, he is barred from

† Gib, Morison, Moncrieff, Graham, &c.

joining

joining in the exercise, and it is his duty to abstain. It is the certain duty of true Christians, to join in the social commemoration of the death of Christ; but if my sitting down at the Lord's table, were to involve in it an avowal of the doctrine of transubstantiation, I am not at liberty to sit down: So, tho' social covenanting be a clear and confessed duty; yet, if I have it not in my power to join in the observance without avowing an entire approbation of the transactions of our fathers in the National Covenant and Solemn League; while, at the same time, my judgment disapproves; if I must solemnly confess to God, matters as evil, which I believe in my heart are not so, and avow matters contrary to these to be good, while I esteem them opposite, I am, at least, excusable, though I do not join in social covenanting in such circumstances. In the transaction of covenanting, as observed among us, we profess to renew the Covenants of our forefathers; and the whole transaction is gone over with circumstances of awful solemnity, and as in the presence of the Lord God.

While the Covenant entered into by our forefathers is reading, the Covenanters are sitting signifying in their unlimited approbation; (their hearts may think otherwise; but this is the language of their appearance: and the idea of renewing covenant includes so much.) By their appearance, they say that all those particulars, testified against by our fathers, were really evil; that all of what was approved in their Testimony was really good; that all to which they engaged was duty, and all against which they engaged was sin. They are signifying also still more explicitly, that they do judge all these matters mentioned in the acknowledgment of sins prefixed to our Bond, to be really sins, and they engage, by solemn oath, to struggle against them as really sins.

If public profession can signify any thing, it cannot signify less in these instances, than is here stated.

Now while the Covenanter is thus employed, let us view the exercise of his mind*. While his appearance and profession approve of the transaction of his forefathers, and that without limitation; perhaps it is his judgment, that they confessed as evils what he can neither condemn nor approve; that they confessed some things as sins, which he, according to his judgment, must have been engaged in, had he been present; that some things were engaged to, as matter of duty, which he disapproves. While he professes acknowledging to God as sins the whole articles mentioned in our own acknowledgment of sins, he reckons many of these dubious if good or evil, many trifling, some desirable. And (awfull!) while he, in the solemn Oath, engages to oppose, to his utmost ability, every of the things mentioned as evils in the aforesaid acknowledgment, he means in his heart to exert no activity against some † of them; and others he wishes to promote and advance: some he reckons indifferent, at others he rejoices ‡. If particulars were necessary, they might be mentioned. While the Covenanter professedly recognizes the transactions of his fathers, and the Confession *as ratified and established* by parliament, he publicly avows, but secretly abhors the Church and State connexion which appears in that transaction, that authority which was employed by parliament in establishing, and that particular instance of its exercise interposed in the ratification.

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* The expression here is very unguarded. The Covenanter ought to have been limited, *who abhors intolerance*, and possibly his mind might not be at the time attentive to the inconsistency; or, he might believe there was none in either case, the exercise of his mind would not be as stated. So here the charge is rash.

† Toleration as opening a door to free profession and worship.

‡ Repeal of Laws against Witchcraft.

He publicly confesses the sinfulness of repealing penal laws against witches, thus intimating his approbation of these laws, and sorrow at the repeal; but in his heart he rejoices that the law is repealed, and abhors the ancient cruel and absurd statute. And certainly his heart is right in this instance, and his profession wrong. A review of the execution of the statute proves this. We defend by saying, that by *Witch* we understand a professed *Fortune-teller*, against whom penal statutes should remain in force. Our defence is vain: * The statute did not affect chiefly, professed fortune-tellers, our fathers did not intend these; nor, when we use in our solemn confession the word *Witches*, can we expect the world to understand that we intend fortune-tellers.

He publicly laments, as a national sin, but secretly rejoices for the slackness of government in *extirpating* Popery and Prelacy, and in its granting unbounded toleration to all sects of professed Christians: and here also his secret exercise seems most commendable. In defence, we here allege, that the word *extirpate*, in the Covenants of our fathers, did not include any thing sanguinary, or any temporal punishment; and the explanation which supposes it does, we reckon an abuse and misinterpretation. Our defence, however, fails, when we compare the expression in question, with Conf. 20. 4. where it is declared, that erroneous persons, of a particular description, may be lawfully proceeded against, by the power of the civil magistrate. And its failure appears still more conspicuous, if we consult on this subject the old Confession, which declares, that obstinate heretics are to be punished, not

* Such a vain defence is here improperly attributed to Seceders in general, who condemn said defence; as some of them condemn said repeal on what they think better grounds.

not only by the censures of the church, but by civil pains; to imprisonment, to confiscation of goods, to banishment, and to death. The strict laws against sheltering any Popish teachers are also clear evidence to the same purpose.

We allege ourselves justified in condemning the Toleration, because it proceeded from an *intention* to introduce Popery. This might be one reason, and may be the best we can now assign of those which then had weight. Our fathers, however, in the Acknowledgment, state the Toleration as evil, because contrary to the Covenants, because unbounded, because it opened a door for the propagation of error. None of these seem now to be reasons which breathe much the spirit of religious liberty. As far as this counteracted the Covenants, the latter were perhaps wrong; the more unbounded it was, and the wider door it opened to error, it came the nearer to true religious liberty. Indeed, as the * Toleration flowed from the King's supremacy, and supposed in him a power to restrain, it was truly detestable. This circumstance is indeed mentioned, and properly disapproved by our fathers; but the other things complained of could not be prevented, without the exercise of the same supremacy, worse applied. Other instances might be adduced, of the Covenanters's profession at war with his sentiment, and of the superior excellency of the latter; but these may suffice to show that such is often the fact.

These considerations shew, that there are, to a conscientious thinking person, real difficulties attending the observance of social covenanting as practised

* The expression *any Toleration, &c.* should have been used here; as it seems the Toleration referred to, did not flow from the king's supremacy.

tised among Seceders. These difficulties appear the more important, if we consider, that our principles concerning covenanting are recognized in all the distinguishing parts of our profession. At accession, a person is called to acknowledge the binding force of the Covenants of our forefathers; and the same acknowledgment is required when he presents his child for baptism: the same is implied also in his communicating with us in the Lord's Supper. This acknowledgment certainly involves an approbation of the Covenants of our forefathers; and as the acknowledgment is unlimited, so the approbation must be understood to be unlimited also: frequently, however, the entire approbation of judgment is wanting.

Besides, it is to be feared that those who acknowledge this obligation, have seldom any clear idea in what it consists. None can suppose that these Covenants could bind, as far as they might include any thing sinful. None may bind himself by any oath to the performance of wickedness, and far less could he bind any other. Farther, it seems evident, that ancestors have no power, by covenant, to bind upon posterity things indifferent in themselves. In this case, the act of ancestors would be will-worship, and the acknowledgment of it, would be a paying that regard to the institutions of men, which is due to God's law alone. Besides, it would suppose, that one generation of men uninspired, have greater powers than any other race succeeding. Farther, in this case, it would be necessary to inquire, Whether we are thus obligated by our relation to the nation as subjects or inhabitants? Or whether the obligation is conveyed by our natural descent from covenanting ancestors? On both sides insuperable difficulties occur. The former would suppose, that

whenever any person enters into the nation, he comes under a new religious obligation; and besides, the Church and State alliance is here approved. The latter would require, that a person, to know whether he be included in the obligation, should be able to ascertain, whether he be indeed descended from covenanting ancestors. This inquiry must be exceedingly difficult. In some cases, as among the descendants of covenanting kings and nobility, the inquiry would be disgraceful, and the truth inscrutable*. To matters of indifference, then, posterity cannot be bound by any covenant of their forefathers.

They can be bound to nothing but such as they would be, and are bound to (as strongly as the law of God commands) independently of any such covenant. Our fathers could bind themselves, in a religious sense, to nothing but what the law of God required of them, nor their posterity to any thing which the same law does not bind on them. It is here said, there is a superadded obligation: An obligation added to what is already absolutely perfect! An accession of strength to what is infinitely strong! †

It is true, sins are aggravated by circumstances.

Our

* This sentence is, perhaps, justly censurable with improper levity.

† These two last sentences express a very improper sentiment in a very improper manner. The very idea of superadded obligation is held up to ridicule as absurd. Such reasoning, however, would conclude with equal force against the obligation of all engagements to religious observance, and all engagements by oath or promise to duty of any kind. The sentiment is therefore absurd taken by itself. The law of God lays under an infinitely strong obligation, to pay a just debt, previous to any promise; but a promise to pay it, lays under another *superadded* obligation to the same thing. The same is true of all promises to perform duty. This agrees with the *just* sentiments immediately following.

Our sins in neglecting the duty of covenanting, in committing those sins against which our ancestors engaged, or neglecting those duties to which they swore, may be aggravated, and rendered more inexcusable, by the good example of our forefathers†. If obligation by Covenants of our forefathers has any farther meaning than this, or something like this, it is to me perfectly unintelligible, if not absurd. Scripture does not authorize it.

However, though this idea may be in the minds of some, when they acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the Covenants; it may be doubted, whether it be the idea naturally conveyed by the expression, or at first intended to be expressed. It is more improbable, that this idea should be present with all who acknowledge this obligation. Indeed, it is most probable, that many of these have no clear notion of the subject. They acknowledge an obligation; but how they came under it, or in what it consists, and often to what it binds, they are ignorant. This acknowledgment is, however, required at accession to our communion, and recognized in many of our public professions during continuance in it.

Actual covenanting is an observance to which, comparatively few, ordinary church-members can be persuaded. It is found impracticable to make, or retain this as a term of ordinary communion. Even church-members, however, are generally expected to profess that they are *lying open to light on this subject*; and many lie all their life thus open to a light which they never intend to use; for conviction as to the duty of an observance against which they have insuperable objections‡. Whatever latitude

† [And benefits derived from their good conduct] should have been added.

‡ Their conduct seems to justify such an inference; but it is not fully warranted by this conduct.

tude is allowed to ordinary Christians in this matter, the case is different with church-officers, ministers, and elders.

Formerly, a young man, who had a view to the ministry, could not be admitted to the study of divinity, till he was an actual covenanter. At present, he is admitted, though he be only lying open to light; but he is expected to declare, that he has no objections against the observance as practised, and is only waiting for an opportunity. After the usual time is spent at the hall, and the usual exercises performed; the next step is, that the young man be called to exhibit specimens of his talents with a view to license. To this step he cannot be admitted unless he has been actually a covenanter. Till he be of this class he cannot be even recommended. No consideration is made of his objections, or the points really and confessedly objectionable in the transaction. If his conscience be so squeamish, that he cannot swallow and digest all, it is needless to take any cognizance of his talents: this one article is thought sufficient to render him certainly unfit.

In some congregations, the case, as to the admission of elders, is the same. In this respect, indeed, congregations differ: a little of Independency is admitted or connived at, and it is so far good, that the article of strict uniformity is dispensed with; but in some places, a person cannot be proposed to an election for the eldership, if he is not an actual covenanter.

It may be doubted, whether the strict requisition of this qualification does not really hurt the cause of religion. A young man, who has spent a third, or
a half

† Here the representation is unduly severe. The truth is, a young man could not regularly obtain license among Antiburghers unless he were a covenanter.

a half of his lifetime, preparing for a public employment in the church, is loath to let all go for nothing. His conscience cannot allow him to join and remain in other communion; he is therefore, at least, under strong temptations, over the belly of his objections, to take the Covenant too much in the mode of a qualifying test. When it is observed, that a young man generally gets over his objections, and finishes his course at the Hall nearly about the same time; that after his studies there are finished, or when he has a near view of their finishing, he sees that to be duty which he could never before discern in this light; there is reason to fear that this is too frequently the case.

It is sometimes evidently otherwise. Some retain their objections after a due time has been spent at the hall; and others defer or interrupt attendance on the hall on this very account. Such are thus detained from public service; and thus the Church is deprived of the service of, perhaps, not the meanest talents; of those who think for themselves, and are conscientious; while a door is open for the admission of others who may be less discerning, take their religion on trust, and are not more conscientious or prudent.

The same observation applies also to elders, where this qualification is required as a pre-requisite to the exercise of that office. And example is not wanting, of a congregation deprived, on this very account, at several successive elections, of two, three, perhaps four, who in all other respects seemed of the most eligible in the congregation, who were mentioned for the election; but it was declared that the nomination would be disorderly, as the persons were not joined in the bond. A degree of disorder is perhaps here preferable to such strict adherence to rules so objectionable.

QUERY 9. I come now to inquire into the tendency of our conduct in the use of the Formula. The Formula consists of a number of questions, so devised that a simple affirmative or negative answer to each, according to its respective nature, amounts to a declaration of the distinguishing principles of the Secession Church. This Formula is used when young men are separated to preach the Gospel, or ordained to exercise the office of the Ministry; and also at the ordination of elders. And in the cases of these classes, no difference in the Formula is admitted, saving what the different circumstances seem to require.

The profession of faith made at answering the Formula, is materially the same as at the administration of baptism, and other cases already considered. Here, however, the profession is more pointed; and with respect to expression, more invariable. At the administration of baptism, the minister, either intentionally or inadvertently, may change the expression. This is surely improper, as it takes the professor at unawares. His assent is required ere he has time to consider. As to the Formula, it is otherwise: the questions are in a printed book; and the answer which must be given to each of them is perfectly known. The profession made on this occasion is of the most solemn kind. It appears to be a declaration in the presence of God, a vow to the living God. The profession and engagement are generally made in the presence of many witnesses: and, as the person is now entering on a public office for life, he as it were fixes his religious character. In fact, he engages to remain the same, in that respect, to his life's end.

If every article, of that faith professed in answering the Formula, were true, and congruous to the sentiments

ments of the professor; and every thing engaged to as duty, proper to be done, and believed by the professor to be indeed his duty; the administration of these questions, for the purpose intended, must meet our approbation, and be highly esteemed. On the other hand, if any thing, in the profession of faith, be untrue, or opposite to the real sentiments of the professor; if any thing be engaged to, as duty, which is either not duty, or not believed to be so; there is, in this observance, something importantly wrong: and, in this case, all the circumstances which heighten the solemnity, must aggravate the evil.

In Formula, Q. 2, The person is called to profess his belief of the *whole* doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechisms, and avows this doctrine as his own faith; and to it he vows before God and rational creatures. In Q. 4. He, in the same unlimited manner, acknowledges the perpetual obligation of the Covenants; acquiescing in these Covenants, and also in the acknowledgment of sins. Every thing in our church government also is approved. Q. 3. Every thing in the Testimony. Q. 5. Here is also a solemn, though but virtual, promise, never to follow divisive courses; i. e. never seek a change, or any alteration from the standard—the *Reformation*, Qu. 6. And yet. Q. 9. and 10. He is bound to declare the *whole counsel of God*.

If we were sure that all these Forms, mentioned in these questions, were perfect*, this would be very well; but unless they are so, the case is far otherwise. If any thing blameable can be found, the Formula is not clear from calling good evil,

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and

* The reasoning here is strained. A person may justly agree to what he knows to be *imperfect*, or else he could agree to nothing human; but yet he must not profess agreement with any thing known to be wrong.

and evil good; putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. There is no possibility of evading this charge. We have already seen, that there are indeed some things exceptionable here avowed. The avowal is the most unlimited, and as clearly stated as words can express. Here is no room to suppose a reserve in the mind; but a declaration is made that there is no such reserve. The Reformation of our ancestors is accordingly treated as immutable; an engagement against seeking to change is plighted; an undertaking of universal defence against every opposition, to whatever part, is solemnly avowed.

If there be, indeed, any thing wrong, in the Reformation, in the Confession of Faith, Covenants, or Act and Testimony, our use of the Formula is also inconsistent with itself, and contradictory: one part of the profession and engagement is at war with another. The person is bound to these forms; but he is also bound to be entirely for the glory of God. If any thing in the former be improper, it is so far opposite to the latter; and it is impossible to perform both parts of the engagement. In this view, we see that the Formula lays the person under a kind of necessity to be unfaithful to obligations. In another view, this is still more glaring. The professor engages, that he will adhere to the *whole* doctrine contained in the *Confession*; the *whole* of which he declares that he believes: and to the *whole* Covenanted Reformation. He engages too against all courses divisive from the aforesaid Reformation. However, in answering Question 10, there is an engagement, to declare, without ceasing, the *whole counsel of God*. Now, the declaration of this, which is a minister's proper business, must clash with his engagement to the above forms. In declaring the whole counsel of God, he must, in some cases, state a dissent from,
and

and follow a divisive course with respect to, the Covenanted Reformation.

It does not remedy the evil, to say, that the matters exceptionable in the Reformation are of small importance. "Greater and less alter not the nature of things." And our Formula treats these parts as matters of very great importance. The emphatic term *whole*, repeated in Q. 2. supposes, at least, so much. I have no need to prove, that the Formula is exceptionable, on account of its unlimited adherence to what is not entirely right. This is believed and confessed by many among us*; and must be allowed by all who disapprove of any the least matter in the whole Covenanted Reformation; and those who have their exceptions are not a few. This consideration, however, renders the case apparently so much the worse. It represents persons knowingly and avowedly embracing and solemnly engaging to the practice of inconsistency.

Let us, for a little, take a view of the inconsistency here exhibited. The person who is to accept the Formula, suppose at license or ordination, has, perhaps in conversation or from the pulpit, made known his sentiments on those topics in which the forms are to him objectionable. Perhaps he gives a similar expression of his sentiments very soon after. Nay, perhaps, of the presbytery present at the transaction, several members may be in similar circumstances. Even on the same day, in their social interviews, their exceptions may be mentioned and avowed.

H 3

Though

* There is more declared here than could be proved perhaps by explicit professions; but how the author of the Treatise on Establishments, or the composer of the Overture already noticed could avoid believing it, seems unaccountable. Let this be applied to the two succeeding paragraphs.

Though this be the case, the same court requires from the candidate an unlimited assent, equivalent to a solemn renunciation and complete preclusion of all objections. The candidate, though in the circumstances above mentioned, gives the most plenary assent to every article, and solemn engagement to every requisition. Prevarication must here appear obvious to the candid observer.

In what light must the candidate appear to those who know his real sentiments, when he solemnly professes to believe the *whole*, and yet really disbelieves some parts; to approve without exceptions, while he yet approves not without exceptions; to desire no change, while yet he eagerly desires one; to follow no divisive courses, while yet he has declared, and means to declare, a dissent in various particulars? The matter appears the more weighty, when we take into account, that the candidate declares his profession, and assumes his engagement, with the solemnity of an oath, and awfulness of a curse. He professes and engages, as he is to be "answerable at the coming of the Lord Jesus, and "as he would desire to be happy with him at his "glorious appearance." In what light must the members of presbytery, who have objections, appear to those who know their sentiments, while they connive at, approve, and assist in conducting such a transaction? In what light will the wicked of the world regard that office and character which requires such a preliminary? In what light will they view religion itself, if its public teachers and stated friends, in their most solemn exercises, must admit into their conduct such flagrant duplicity? And what is the native consequence to the interests of religion, and to the souls of men? It grieves me to the heart,

heart, that "such things may be alleged, and cannot be refuted."

To you, Brethren, it belongs. Strive for a remedy: By earnest prayer, and vigorous endeavour; by zeal for God; by impartial befriending of every truth, and courageous opposition to the most popular errors; by steady resolution not to spare the dearest abuse, nor shrink from attempting the most disagreeable part of necessary reformation; let us resolve upon an impartial, universal, and radical scrutiny; upon confessing, resigning, and disclaiming, whatever may be found improper; retaining and vindicating whatever appears right; cheerfully, prudently, and vigorously essaying and prosecuting, every necessary and salutary amendment. In such a scrutiny, perhaps several other matters, besides these mentioned, might appear to require attention. To be convinced of this, we may inquire, for example,

QUERY 10. * What is our general practice with respect to the Administration of the Lord's Supper, and the Settlement of Vacant Congregations?

As to the former: We reckon it and treat it as a most solemn ordinance; and a conduct blameless, to a certain degree, is necessary in those who are admitted to the participation. Our Lord hath intimated, and we avow, that this ordinance should be frequently observed by his people. We allow that, in the primitive ages of Christianity, the societies of the faithful were thus employed every Lord's day, and we approve of their practice. In our mode, however, such frequency is impossible. It is seldom above twice, often but once observed in the same congregation, in a whole year. But, to give frequent opportunities,

* Here a subject rather extraneous to the main design is introduced. It is, however, not less important.

opportunities, different congregations fix on different times for the ordinance; and several ministers meet to assist at the service. This is necessary, as there are several days partly employed in public worship, and a routine of service to which one person is not equal: and it is the less inconvenient, as, in the neighbouring congregations, many chuse rather to attend where the communion is, than abide at home; and so the want of sermon is the less disagreeable. There is, however, some inconvenience here. The whole congregation cannot follow their minister; or if they could, perhaps they cannot be accommodated: And so, many are precluded the enjoyment of public ordinances.

It might be desirable that such inconvenience be prevented. Perhaps it might be equally conducive to edification, and it would be certainly no less conformable to the primitive examples of Christianity, if the Lord's Supper were more frequently observed in each congregation. Thus every Christian in a society might enjoy a more frequent opportunity of obeying Christ's command, and would be more seldom deprived of the dispensation of the gospel.

Here it will be objected, that frequency would lessen solemnity, and render partakers more careless in preparation and observing. It might as well be alleged, that we are not to pray, nor to endeavour the exercise of faith frequently, lest we lessen the impression of their importance. Enjoyments truly religious don't cloy, but whet the desire; and in exercises truly religious the well employed Christian increases his strength.

But "one minister could not undergo the whole toil; and weak congregations could not bear the frequent expence. The toil might perhaps decrease, if it met with resolute endeavour. The number of communicants

communicants at one solemnity would be fewer; fewer tables contain them; and less labour would be necessary at the exhortation.

As to the week-day services, which are the source of the greater part of the labour, these are of the nature of a free-will-offering; and as far as they are observed in this view, they are no doubt proper, and may be acceptable. In this view, he who dedicates a day, dedicates it to the Lord; and he who professes to dedicate a day, or part of a day, and yet curtails, is obnoxious to the curse denounced against the deceiver who offers to the Lord the *corrupt thing*. The service will be liable to a similar stigma, if such set times should be respected in the light of divine institutions; if they arrogate such immutable respect as is due to the Sabbath of the Lord. When our fathers began to exemplify such observances, as accompaniments to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, there is no doubt but they had the fear of God before them, love to God in their hearts, and gratitude to him exciting their conduct. But should we affirm, that such accompaniments are indispensable to the proper and acceptable observance of the ordinance, the undue regard to such observances might provoke God to blast their benefit, or render them a snare: There is danger, lest they be viewed in a light too similar to that in which the Papists and Episcopalians view the days dedicated to the idolatrous worship of their Saints and Martyrs.

If in each congregation, the Lord's Supper could be enjoyed sufficiently often, the circumstances of some congregations might admit of the present quantity of week-day service, while it might be unsuitable to the circumstances of others. Those societies who could offer the service, not by constraint, but willingly, would do well: those who could not,
ought

ought to be excused. This would lessen the expence to weak congregations; and, together with the reduction of the number of strangers, which would take place in the proposed plan, would render the expence equally or more tolerable than it is at present.

As to the Settlement of Vacant Congregations among us: They have the important privilege of choosing their own ministers, and are uncontroubled in the exercise of this right. This right is of the utmost importance; but, that the benefit may be enjoyed, it seems necessary, that those concerned should be fully apprised, where it resides, and how it is to be applied. If this is not the case, the good may not be obtained; and while the means are preserved, the end may be lost.

Four things seem necessary to the attainment of the full benefit of this right. The congregation ought to be fully apprised, 1. What description of persons have a right to vote; 2. What shall constitute a majority; 3. How this majority is to be discovered; and 4. What is to be the consequence of a majority on the one side and on the other, as far as possible.

1. As to the first, we are not sufficiently agreed, and our practice is not uniform. It is generally required that the voters be Seceders; but I am not certain whether a person, while under scandal, is or ought to be, in all cases, excluded. I believe this is not settled. In some places, females are excluded, in others they may be electors. That they should be in any case excluded, merely on account of sex, is not enjoined in scripture, and seems contrary to reason*. Women are, indeed, prohibited from public

* " Here justice and reason are violated, and also the Secession-Testimony itself. In Disp. p. 160. the suffrage of females is

lic teaching; but we do not, on that account, prohibit them from sitting down at the Lord's table, and there making a public profession. They are admitted to present their children for baptism, and to join in public covenanting. In each of these, they must be as chargeable with *speaking* in the church, as they can be in using their right of suffrage in the choice of a teacher. In a religious view, they are equally interested as the other sex; and they are often of equal discernment. To exclude a mother in widowhood, is to exclude one of the most interested; to exclude a wife, because a wife, from an independent suffrage, is to erect a patron in every family, and make the husband, in this instance, lord over the conscience: besides, it gives to a single man, perhaps of precarious residence, an equal quantity of influence, as to him who is a resident householder, and represents a numerous family. And why a female, merely for want of a family connection, should be excluded from the exercise of her right, seems scarcely evident.

In some cases, the right is confined to heads of families. This is liable to equal objections as those above stated, but in a more extensive degree.

In other cases, the suffrage is allowed to such church-members only of either sex, as make distinct contribution for supporting the gospel. To found influence, in this matter, on the payment of contributions, is the very soul of that patronage against which we testify. And besides, this most unreasonable method throws into the hands of a solitary individual, or even of a man or maid-servant, who the

evidently allowed. "Office-bearers in the church ought to be set over congregations by the call of the *majority of such* in these congregations, as are admitted to full communion with the church in all her sealing ordinances."

the next season may be far removed, a quantity of influence equal to what is enjoyed by a father and mother, with a numerous family, and of fixed residence.

It seems equal and reasonable, that the quantity of influence be adjusted, as nearly as possible, to the quantity of interest in this affair. And for this purpose, it seems most eligible, that every regular Seceder in the congregation, male and female, whether giving a distinct contribution, or not, should be allowed to vote in the election. This appears calculated for preserving to all their right; and it apportion the influence to the interest of parties.

But whatever be the qualifications entitling to a vote, they ought to be uniform, and generally known. They ought not to be subject to be modified by the inclination, or imperfect views, of the person who presides in the election. Otherwise, he will have too much in his power; the people may have just reason to complain; and a lasting dissension may thus originate. The persons disappointed will readily allege, that, had the mode been different, the majority might have been otherwise; at the same time, while the minority are murmuring, the young man may be in doubt whether he be indeed the object of the majority of just voters, and thus be discouraged from accepting the call. Apparently on these accounts, a congregation may be, and has been, deprived of a settlement, and forced to continue long vacant.

2. What is a majority seems easily determined. The chief difficulty occurs when more than two objects are put on the list. In this case, one may have a greater number of votes than any of the rest, and yet fewer than they have all together; and so not the majority of the congregation. It seems improper on this ground to declare this person elected, and

and sustain the call; because the majority of the congregation may be averse. The point, however, is not yet settled. Sometimes, a person is declared duly elected on such a foundation; at others, the decision is referred to farther proceedings. At any rate, the people beforehand are ignorant which of the modes may be adopted, and so cannot accommodate to either.

3. In collecting the votes, the chief object is to ascertain, that what is sustained as a majority be indeed what it seems. When there are more than two objects on the list, sometimes they are all declared off, save those two who have the greatest number of votes; these are put on a new list, and those who voted for others are called to vote anew, and arrange themselves on either side. This mode gives perfect justice to the candidates retained on the list; but not to those rejected. It is possible, had the alternative been made, that one of those rejected might have been chosen, rather than the person who is chosen.

* For example, in a congregation of 90 voters, A, B, and C, are candidates. The votes for A are 40; for B 30; for C 20. C is declared off, and his voters anew range themselves under A, or B, as each individual may think proper. Here A and B get perfect justice; but the congregation and C are wronged. C's 20 voters may cast the balance in favour of either A or B, or render them equal. But, all the while, C may be more agreeable than either to a majority of the congregation. He is most agreeable to his own 20; and he may be more agreeable than A, to the whole, or to 26 of B's 30; or more agreeable than B, to the whole, or to 26 of

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of

* This paragraph, and the following, seem more fanciful than profitable.

of A's 40: and in either he would have at least 46, the majority of 90. The probability that this would be the case is not very strong; but the possibility is evident: and since it is so, to prevent reflections in the congregation, and scruple in the mind of the candidate, it might surely be proper to give up this mode for one more perfect. It is certainly painful for a person, who considers the voice of a majority as a call from God to a particular conduct, to engage in such conduct while yet uncertain what is the real mind of the majority, and what the call of God.

Sometimes the successful candidate is otherwise determined. After it appears that A has a greater number of votes than either B or C, the latter are both declared off; and the only remaining question is, A, or not? i. e. A, or remain for a while vacant? As, in the former supposition, C was wronged, here both B and C seem to suffer injury. It is perhaps difficult to hit a plan without exception. Either of these mentioned, however, might be more perfect, if accompanied with some questions of *preference*. In the former case, C might be justly declared off, after these two questions are put and negatived: 1, Prefer C to A, or not? 2, Prefer C to B or not? In the latter case, both B and C might be declared off, after these questions are put and negatived. 1, Prefer B to A, or not? 2, Prefer C to A, or not? Such questions would be more numerous, according to the number of objects; but seem suitable and necessary to the discovery of a real majority, and for preventing grudge or injury.

Whatever mode be adopted, it ought to be uniform and not unexpected. The people ought not to be taken at unawares; nor the person who moderates allowed to devise an arbitrary mode. It is improper,

proper, but perhaps true, that in the same quarter, at four successive elections, four different modes have been adopted: And, seemingly from misunderstanding, a congregation may be kept in a vacant state for several years. A person in the circumstances of A, has been justly outed upon the principles of the first of the two cases mentioned; and upon the principles of the second, the same person unjustly declared to be elected, and his call sustained.*

Our common mode of collecting the vote, after the question is stated, is uncertain, troublesome, and subject to litigation; and ought to give way to the method by roll-call, or dividing the house. We must often resort to one of these, after the common mode has proved ineffectual, and has given origin to a lasting strife. To adopt them at first, might save time, and prevent an evil which afterwards we may be unable to remedy.

4. It is necessary, as far as possible, that electors be fully apprized of the tendency of a vote on either side of every question. Before they give their vote, they ought to be informed, and have impressed on their minds, its whole tendency. This is profitable for them; and to afford it, as far as possible, is the duty of an impartial moderator. If this be not attended to, the people may be unjustly deprived of an important advantage, and trepanned into a measure they will afterward regret.

The above observations are equally applicable to decisions in Courts. A, B, C, may represent the objects of a vote in Synod, as well as candidates for the Ministry. And perhaps even there, the

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mode

* The case alluded to here is, it seems, mis-stated through misinformation.

mode of suffrage is not always proof against animadversion.

On the subject of settlements, the following doctrine seems to be tenable.

1, All regular, adult members of the congregation have a right to vote.

2, The greater number of these forms the majority.

3, This majority to be discovered in a manner indisputable.

4, In a list of more than two objects, that object is to be declared elected, who is preferred by the majority, respectively to each of the others.

5, To find this object, the decision of a competent number of *questions of preference* seems necessary.

6, The whole mode to be uniform; or, at least, previously understood by the electors.

7, The electors to have always in view, the nature and tendency of every vote.

These observations, however, are proposed with submission. I am now not dictating, but craving remedies to evils which seem important; but as far as any promising observation occurs, it may be offered, and those to whom it is addressed will judge of its propriety. I hope to be understood in a similar view, when I presume to enquire,

QUERY 11, What may be the most effectual remedies for the evils complained of in the foregoing pages?

It is much easier to point out evils than to remedy, or even avoid them. Many of the evils mentioned it will be difficult to evade; and in the endeavour we may be in danger of incurring others of equal or greater malignity. Yet, certainly, something ought to be attempted. But what shall this be? Here

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we need to be lowly and dependent, and trust in the divine promise, that God will lead and clearly teach his way.

The first step of this remedy, is to ascertain the existence of the evil. And it will be proper to institute a radical and impartial scrutiny, Whether there be indeed some things defective, foreign, or wrong in our public Testimony? And whether we be really chargeable with dissingenuity in displaying it?

To this examination we ought to come, not backwardly, but cheerfully; not averse to discover what is wrong, but eager to find it, and eager to remedy. Such an examination requires, that we cease from supposing every thing done by our forefathers right, or every thing in our profession blameless. It supposes that we regard every particular with watchful suspicion. Such an examination is our duty; to it we are commanded; and we ought to implore Divine aid, and attempt the execution.

2, Such a search will be followed by an open acknowledgment of the evils discovered. If we set out upon the supposition of existing evils, and be eager to find and destroy them, the discovery will not be kept a secret. If it be evident that such things exist, and fully clear that they are evil, it will be improper either to deny their existence or to palliate their malignity. To deny the existence will be a vain attempt; to palliate their malignity, after discovery, must proceed from intolerable pride, and involve the party in the guilt, both of the evil itself, and of the hypocrisy of the palliation.

3. Sincere acknowledgment requires that we forsake and disclaim the evil acknowledged. No regard to consistency of character, or honour of party, should deter us from this. We never pretended to

be infallible, or attained at perfection. If our inconsistency lie in departing from evil and prosecuting good, it is honourable—it is reformation—it is that to which we are most solemnly bound. We profess our desire to forsake evil, and disclaim error; and will we not set ourselves pointedly against those evils and errors which have done us most harm, and in which we have been chiefly engaged? These are the proper objects of our revenge and eager opposition.

Against these our Testimony ought to be pointedly directed. They are evils equally malignant as others; riveted in their influence by long indulgence, and rendered popular among the serious by the venerable names who have admitted them. If we spare these, when seen to be evil, we will condemn ourselves in the thing which we allow, and appear chargeable with testifying, in the rest of our profession, not for God, but for men.

In this exercise it will be necessary * to give a clear and unequivocal Testimony against all ecclesiastical establishments constituted by civil authority: And not merely against particular instances, but against the principle itself. We profess to testify against Antichristianism; and why not against this species of influence and existence so extensive, and so long retained by us. As we have been so long backward to abjure it, and obstinate in our adherence, it is now high time strenuously to oppose, and resolutely to discard. This, with all its concomitant evils, we are under special obligations openly to abjure, resolutely to oppose; to give clear testimony

* It might be improper and divisive to insist on the necessity of this. Perhaps forbearance might be more eligible: and that the Testimony should involve nothing on either side of the question.

testimony for opposite truth, and vigorously to practise opposite duty.

This principle seems the chief source of every thing exceptionable in our Testimony; and a full renunciation of this will lead to purify, simplify, and accommodate the Testimony to our own times. It needs to be purified, that we may honestly adhere to it; simplified, that we may adhere to it with judgment; and accommodated to present times, that it may serve the purposes of a Testimony. It is not meant that our forms, or those books in which they are contained, ought to be disused. They are the most excellent of their kind. Both for brevity and clearness, the Confession and Catechisms stand perhaps unparalleled, while in point of doctrine they are the least exceptionable. The display of the Secession Testimony contains a rich treasure of gospel truth, and a bright exhibition of God's goodness, in enabling his servants to be valiant for the truth. Though the Covenants contains somewhat exceptionable, yet this is comparatively little.

The forms are not in themselves so exceptionable, as our use of them is improper. We may esteem them, and yet not reckon them immutable; we may venerate them, and yet not treat them as absolutely perfect. In our adherence to them, we ought to state our exceptions; or in a new Exhibition of our Testimony, exclude the exceptionable articles.

4. Such an Exhibition would require to leave room for amendment, lest posterity should fall into the same error. A new Exhibition of our Testimony will not be perfect, and ought not to be treated as such. It ought to be left open to correction, and appointed to undergo a frequent review. Thus
error

error could not obtain such firm footing; abuse could not be so permanent.

Were the Testimony thus purified, simplified, and modernized, it must be more valuable: and an adherence to it at obtaining baptism, at accession, or on other occasions, would be a more easy transaction to a tender conscience. In the mean time, it seems necessary that the strict requisition, of unlimited assent to every part of the forms, should be remitted: and though our written forms are in some points wrong, our public professions should exhibit a commendable difference from them.

5. The exceptions in the Formula seem easy to be removed. Upon the proposed alterations in other things, they would almost fall of course. At any rate, all improper, even all doubtful and needless expressions, ought to be erased. Perhaps a person ought never to be required to accept such a form without any limitation. As it is never certainly perfect, he might be allowed to declare the sense in which he understands it, and state his exceptions. If he can assent without explanation or exceptions, it is well; if not, the Presbytery can judge, whether his explanation or exceptions are such as have a right to exclude him from the exercise of the office in question. In this way too, a more certain estimate might often be formed of a person's real sentiments, than by the present way of unlimited assent.

6. In Covenanting, it might be better to give up the idea of the perpetual obligation of the ancient Covenants (till this be better explained); and consider our obligation to duty, and to the duty of covenanting as flowing immediately from our perpetual obligation to the law of God. The idea of *renewing* these Covenants seems equally untenable.

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How a few private individuals can properly *renew* a National Covenant sworn by nobles, kings, and parliaments, or a Solemn League of all the three kingdoms, is not easily understood; besides, this expression involves too much the idea of unlimited approbation. It would be fully as proper that every generation, and every individual, observe the duty on its own account, and independently of ancestors.

Our Acknowledgment of Sins, might be cleared of what is improper, curtailed of what is impertinent, abridged in what respects antiquity, and extended as to what is recent or present; and thus modernized and adapted to present use. This ought to be an accommodating form, at all times ready to receive important matter, according to existing circumstances. An acknowledgment of this kind could with greater propriety be recognized in the solemn Oath of Covenant.

The bond sworn in this oath ought to be simple and religious, and, like the Acknowledgment, at convenient intervals adapted to the demands of present circumstances. The duty of covenanting might be observed, not as a qualification for entering the pulpit, but by all in general. It seems to be a stated duty, and no reason appears why a single individual may not publicly observe it. The proper season for this might be, when the person accedes to the religious society. The society also might observe it in a social capacity as often as convenient. Perhaps it should not be a term of Christian communion; and if not, there appears no reason why it should be a term of ministerial. The Covenants, thus engaged in, might find more to join in them than at present; and the exercise seems equally scriptural and edifying. Some of these alterations

terations might be useful as remedies; at any rate, some alterations are necessary. Several persons, however, are averse to any change, and oppose every innovation.

QUERY 12. We inquire, finally, into the validity of the reasons urged against attempting to remedy the evils above complained of.

1. Some of us deny their existence. As matters in our Testimony they cannot be denied; but it is denied that they are evil. Some of us are yet of the same opinions as our Reformers and the first Seceders, with respect to every thing in the Covenants: approve of civil and ecclesiastical establishments, and are averse to the extension of full religious liberty to others. These are more consistent than the rest; but they are consistent in favouring what is wrong. It is a grievance that such opinions should be yet among us. It is comfortable, if the majority be of different sentiments: and if so, conformity to the minority cannot be expected. At any rate, conformity is purchased too dearly, when at the price of truth and conscience. Let those who deny the evil of these things complained of, read for their conviction publications by some of ourselves on these subjects *: let them inquire, Is not God Lord of the conscience? And are we not to allow others the same liberty of worship which we wish for ourselves,—to treat others as we wish others to treat us?

2. Some who confess that the grievances do exist, yet allege them so trivial that they may be spared. Though this may not be the verbal expression, it is the language of conduct. But is it a trifle to admit any known evil to remain undisturbed? Do we admit the doctrine of venial sins? If we did so, Is it a trifle to approve what breathes the spirit of Antichrist? Or

* Mr. Graham on Ecclesiastical Establishments, &c.

to be insincere in our public professions of religion? Trifling evils are not to be spared; and if they were, these could not be ranked among them.

3. But say some, "A more gentle remedy may be found*." Many of us are of this opinion; and hence our endeavours to palliate these matters, by referring to the Seceders Answers to a Mr. Nairn, who denied that subjection to civil magistrates, if of a different religion, was lawful, and so separated from them on the subject of the magistrate's power. These Answers we use as our Explication and Commentary on such parts of the Forms as seem exceptionable. Unhappily here, The Commentary is at war with the Text. The declaration in these Answers is not so much an explanation, as a contradiction of those parts in the Confession and Covenants. And even these Answers are deficient on the point of religious liberty: though they were more perfect than perhaps any thing in their day†.

Another similar palliation was lately proposed, by an overture containing some of the true principles of religious liberty; and proposing, that these should be declared to the world as expressing the sense in which we *understand* the objectionable parts in the forms. It is, however, absolutely impossible for us, or any other, so to *understand* matters.

Thus to understand these points is to make opposites synonymous. This is as much as to say, that when we say *black*, we intend *white*; when we speak of *darkness*, we are to be understood as speaking

* As these objections are only supposed from the general sentiments of the party, the quotation mark was improperly applied to this one, and those following: if it seemed to denote what is not true, That they are the *words* of ministers.

† The doctrine of the Glaslites and Quakers was more perfect on this head.

ing of *light*. It is saying, that when we, in the most solemn manner, profess the sentiments of *persecution*, we are giving an open avowal of the most unlimited *religious liberty*. The proposal, and treatment it met in Synod, rather displayed the existence and malignity of the evil, than afforded any relief. We wished to purge out the leaven, but could not; because we *must not* grant that there is in the forms any thing wrong. Every thing must be capable of a sound sense; and hence, though our declaration amount to a flat contradiction, yet we must call it an explanation, and use it as a vindication.

4. "But since there is no perfection, why should we struggle? We have, it is true, in our public profession, some foibles, but perhaps it is impossible to attain to a more perfect exemption." It is true there is no perfection; it is also true, perhaps, our foibles are fewer than those of any other sect: yet they are too numerous. And though our fathers, who did not advert to them, are not to be so much condemned for admitting them, we who see them have no such excuse. Though we cannot expect to attain perfection; yet we are certainly to hate and oppose every false and every wicked way. Glaring evils call for opposition: and the very proposal of this excuse is suspicious: it would preclude for ever all reformation. Besides, in the prosecution of what is good, we may depend on the Divine blessing to further our endeavours; but if we knowingly, and with consent, allow the continuance of evil, we are guilty.

5. "Our Church is not ripe for such an agitation. We cannot bear it; it is yet unseasonable." This is a suspicious excuse: all those who are too interested to desire, or too indolent to attempt public

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lic reform in Church or State, have this evasion always ready, "It is not yet seasonable." This may be true, and delay may be admitted in cases where sin and duty are not concerned. Where these are concerned, it can never have place. Whenever sin appears, it is seasonable to cease from it. After an evil seen, avowedly to tolerate its continuance for a time, is so long to establish the practice by a law. While we wait for the season, let it be considered that inconsistency, duplicity, and prevarication*, are continuing to stain our public profession; and while we spare these, from the consideration of the unseasonableness of change, we admit that sin is for the present seasonable. While we thus say, *A little sleep, a little slumber*, our destruction as a Church may come like a whirlwind. But why is this reform unseasonable?

6. "It would spoil the peace of congregations, by directing the minds of the people to abuses of which they were ignorant, or to which they were inattentive." The peace of congregations is a matter of great importance. The honour of religion, and the edification of Christians, are here much concerned. There is, however, a common mistake with respect to the people in this matter. Many of them are neither ignorant of abuses, nor inadvertent to them. Many would more cheerfully acquiesce in a change, than continue in the present state. But though this were not the case, Is peace to be purchased at the expence of truth and conscience? Is it to rest upon the foundation of the people's ignorance? Is this to be the mother of devotion?

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* The severity here is blameable: for though I cannot see the possibility of believing that a king, as such, has no more power in the Church than his meanest subject; and also, subscribing the Confession, or swearing the Formula, without such duplicity, &c. perhaps another may think he can.

votion? A peace on these terms seems too like a league with death, and a covenant with hell. Such a league will deceive all who trust in it. There is at this moment, perhaps, greater danger of dissension in congregations from the continuance of these abuses, than would be from any attempt to remove them. Many at present are remaining in communion, on the expectation of such an attempt. Many who have presented children to baptism, would not now repeat their profession. Such would cheerfully give their suffrage to a reform. Since this is the case, Whether is better, to risk the evil of discord in the indulgence of sin, or to risk it in the prosecution of duty?

7. But "Would not the proposed scrutiny and alteration reflect dishonour on our venerable ancestors, and disgrace our Party." Inconsistency is an imperfection; but it is an imperfection inseparable from human nature in its present state. When we allege that our ancestors were in some points wrong, we reproach them no more than by alleging that they were men fallible like ourselves: and if our veneration excludes this, it is too much of the Popish kind; and needs only a little establishment by continuance, and augmentation by prejudice, to place them on the level with the Saints of the Calendar. If ever our respect leads to favour their faults, it is idolatrous in its nature. Regard to the honour of a creature is thus set in opposition to our regard to the honour of God, and prevails against it.

Regard to the honour of our party, as far as it prevails in this matter, is of the same nature. This principle binds many in the world to prosecute folly, and continue abuse. A prince, after declaring war, will not seek peace, lest he should condemn

demn his former arrogance. The duellist, after he has taken notice of an affront, will not overlook, but resent it at the risk of his life. A church will not review her forms, lest she should seem to confess, "Perhaps I have been mistaken." Thus abuse is bound on men by the cord of pride. They persist in evil, to avoid the imputation of,—What? of—Humanity. The attempt, however, is vain. Our aversion to acknowledge mistakes, will not prevent others from discovering, and effectually exposing them. Our numerous adversaries, though blind to their own inconsistency, have the eyes of an eagle to discover our faults, and the voice of a trumpet to proclaim them in the world. But though this were not the case, Is not this regard, as far as it has influence to prevent duty, a preference of the honour of party to the honour of God; a loving the praise of men above the praise of God; a fasting for strife and debate, and offering the *accursed thing*?

While we thus seek for honour, we are in danger of finding disgrace—the disgrace of sin. They who thus would exalt themselves, are in so far exalting themselves against God, and cannot prosper, but must be abased: while those who humble themselves before the Lord, in departing from their iniquity, are honourably employed, and will be exalted in due season.

8. "But would not an alteration in our Public Forms break - our congregations, diminish our numbers, prevent our multiplication, and injure ministers with respect to their subsistence in the world?" All these would be highly unpleasant, and are therefore to be deprecated. They are not, however, certain consequences. And if they were probable, a prospect of consequences is never to hinder the performance of duty clearly inculcated.

The breach of congregations is equally probable if the attempt be omitted, as if it be put in operation; and if the breach of congregations is to be prevented by abuse alone, it is better it should occur. This, however, and the diminution of our numbers, there is little reason to fear. If it be supposed that many would desert the cause on account of the discovery of abuses; these many must be supposed to desert, either because such abuses have existed, or because they are now abandoned. The former class would find no community where the same abuses do not exist in equal or greater degrees, or others of a still more serious nature. Our *own* abuses are not stated by the writer of these observations, because equal or greater do not appear in other communions, but because they are our *own*. A similar examination would discover the abuses of other denominations, at least, equally numerous, equally malignant, and adhered to with equal obstinacy; while others would appear of which we are comparatively clear.

The greatest desertion might be expected to the other class of Seceders; and to that communion many of the above observations are equally applicable. In one respect, they are even more applicable. The bone of contention, the religious clause of the Burghers-oath, involves in its nature the spirit of Antichrist. It avows Religious Establishment by civil authority, and binds to the support of such establishment. The use of the Oath characterizes it a "Mark of the Beast, without which no person is permitted to buy or sell;"—as if a person should not make a coat, or a pair of shoes, or sell a pound of groceries, unless he be of the established religion. There is little danger then of desertion because the abuses *have existed*. And those who
desert

desert because abuses are *ejected*, do more good to the society by their absence than by their presence: they desert us on account of our apostacy from evil.

Our multiplication is probably not less retarded by our adherence to these abuses, than it would be by their ejection. But if this had been always the prevalent respect, our forefathers had never made secession. The faithful have always been comparatively few. The strictness of true religion is always ungrateful to the many.

“ But it will endanger the salary of ministers, “ by weakening their congregations.” This consequence is doubtful; and the objection is so like that used against every reformation, that it scarcely ought to be named. “ The Reform might otherwise be eligible; but our Thrones, our Prerogatives, our Revenues; our Titles, our Pensions, “ our Places and Expectations, are in danger; the “ Mitre, the Primacy, the Bishopric, Deanry, Vicarage, Curacy; the Kirk, the Manse and Glebe, “ the Teinds, the Presentation and Prospect; the “ Meeting-house, Stipends and Collection, are all “ in *danger*: let all Reformation be avoided, let it “ be execrated.” God forbid that such motives should influence our religious conduct. “ He who “ loveth house or land more than me,” says Christ, “ is not worthy of me.”

In the above observations we have seen that serious evils do really exist among us; that these affect our religious conduct: the necessity of some attempt to remedy has been declared; some hints toward a radical cure have been offered; the objections most specious considered, and exposed: It is our duty to attempt purging out the old leaven, and thus doing good, trust consequences to the Lord.

APPENDIX.

A VINDICATION, &c.

INDUCED by some such considerations as the foregoing piece urges, one party of Seceders had, before its appearance, taken some measures for altering their mode of expressing adherence to the Covenanted Reformation: and the other party engaged in a similar alteration soon after. When the latter had begun to adopt some measures to this end, a pamphlet appeared, entitled, "*An Epitome of Religion,*" by *John Thomson, late minister of the gospel at Kirkintilloch*, one of their number.

This piece contains, among various other matter, an attempt to defend the religious connection between Church and State which existed at the Reformation, and of the National Covenants and Covenanting then practised: And also, severe strictures on those of his own party, who wished to alter or retrench any part of the usual adherence to said Reformation and Covenants. Such of this author's arguments, as form specious objections to what has been above inculcated, claim some of our notice.

He begins by asserting, Epitome, p. 39, 40. "This Church [of Scotland] famous in the annals of the Reformation, *settled her constitution agreeable to the sacred rule, the divine standard, the word of God contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.* This constitution is a most beautiful connected system of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, exhibited in her Confession of Faith and other standards.

standards. And our reforming progenitors being exposed to temptations, enemies, and dangers, they, *agreeably to the scriptures, and after the most divinely approved examples*, in concurrence with the Civil State, dedicated the Church and Nation to the Most High God; engaging by the most solemn Covenants, to adhere to, maintain, and defend this National Reformation. This is the Covenanted Reformation of Scotland.

“ To this the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms was *agreeably* collateral, and conjoined.”

If our author could make good this assertion, or those parts of it which we have marked in Italics, he would, doubtless, bear away the palm, and none who acknowledges the Bible would dare to find a flaw in the Reformation or Covenants. Till arguments support the assertion, however, he will excuse our full assent.

After a digressive effusion on Politics and the present war, by way of Episode, the subject is resumed, page 45, “ There is a *novel* question greatly agitated, viz. Whether religion, as a Divine service, comes within the sphere of the civil magistrates official concern and cognizance,” &c.? included in that question, “ Whether he is guardian of both tables of the Divine law, or only of the second table?”

This question is not *novel*. It, or one equivalent, was agitated, as has been shewed, in the early ages of Christianity, when many of the Fathers held the negative. It has been often agitated since; Dissenters, especially when persecuted, holding the negative, and Established Churches the affirmative. The same side was taken by the Church of Scotland at the Reformation, and is supported by our author, who argues, page 46, That though the Old Testa-
ment

ment had its peculiarities, the connection which then existed between the Civil Polity and the Church was none of them, but is still of Divine authority. Because symptoms of such a connection existed prior to the Mosaic dispensation. Then heads of families were bound to support the interests of religion in their families, after the example of Abram and Joshua, and "families are Church and State in miniature."

Families are not Church and State in miniature. They differ far from the State. In the family, the head is both the *maker* of the laws, and sees them executed. A civil magistrate, unless he be absolute, is only the executor of the laws, and has but a partial power in legislation.

And even a master of a family, suppose a Papist, may not, in support of the interests of religion in the family, compel a grown son or servant to join with him in his idolatrous worship. Nor may a Protestant master compel a Papist in judgment, son or servant, to join against his conscience in family religion. The case is the same whether the head of the family be of the true religion, or of a false one; for "conscience, though erring, doth ever bind."

Nor are Abram and Joshua proper examples in this case. They lived under peculiar dispensations which affected the family relation. Many things proper, even before the Mosaic dispensation, are superseded by Christianity, though our author, page 48, says otherwise. Such are sacrifices, and an union of civil and religious power; such as appeared most eminent in Melchizedeck, and of which we have some resemblance in Abram who was a prince, and and yet offered sacrifices: which also appears to have been vested in the first-born, and to have constituted

stituted the birth-right. Melchizedeck and Abram acted in the joint capacities of prince and priest: but this gives no authority for even Uzziah to do likewise. Nor will it give any countenance to the Pope's supremacy in State and Church; nor any thing of a similar constitution. Joshua, or any other Israelite, not only might, but were commanded to kill, with his own hand, his nearest of kin, who should attempt to entice him to idolatry. Surely we are not bound to imitate this example.

From this argument, founded on a mistaken view of the family relation, of that between ruler and subject, and of the state of things in the patriarchal age, we pass to the argument from the Mosaic dispensation itself. Page 48, "The Divine Legislator in Church and State, instituted a very intimate connection between them. This evinces, that there is no inconsistency in such a connection in itself; and that such a connection was not inconsistent with the nature and interests of either. And *why* may not a connection, suitable to the New Testament dispensation, take place in Christian Churches and States with equal safety and advantage? I think the Divine example warrants it." Why!—Because He who instituted the connection between the Jewish Church and State was *Divine*. Because in instituting that connection, He dictated all the laws of the State, and formed the specific plan of the Civil Constitution; He dictated also the frame of the Church in all its parts; He instituted the nature, extent, and all the terms of the connection. But in none of those states called Christian, hath He dictated the peculiar form of the Civil Constitution; neither hath he specified the terms of any such connection with undefined States; nor declared the nature or extent of such supposed connection. So that now
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such a connection must subsist between a Church of Divine constitution, and a State of human constitution, upon terms of man's device.—Because such a connection, though suitable to the Jewish, would be unsuitable to the Christian dispensation; for the Jewish Church and nation were framed for, and adapted to the purpose of separating and keeping separate, from the rest of mankind, a particular family; and from the rest of the globe, a particular region to be the residence of this family; and from all the cities of the world, one to be the only legal place for peculiar religious services. But the Christian Church was designed and fitted to abolish this separation, and to break down that law of ordinances which constituted the separating wall between Jew and Gentile; to obliterate those geographical boundaries, which formerly limited the Church to a spot; to cause that no longer should Jerusalem be the only place where men ought solemnly to worship; nor Israel alone the people of God: but that Gentiles also should become fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and that the Church should extend to all kindreds and nations, and the gospel be preached in all the world. Because a connection with the State must, and does always render the Church, in a certain degree, geographical. This was very suitable to the Jewish, but is very unsuitable to the Christian religion. “Why may not a connection, *suitable* to the New-Testament dispensation, take place in Christian Churches and States with *equal* safety and advantage as in the Jewish?” Because, properly speaking, no Christian *State* ever did exist; for Christ never framed a civil constitution, nor instituted such a State with which his Church might be connected. Because the New Testament dispensation is *unsuitable* to every such connection. Because the *Divine*

Legislator

Legislator hath not stated terms of connection for his Church with civil States; and it is not *equally* safe and advantageous to obey human devices, as Divine institutions.

Till we can obtain civil constitutions divinely instituted, and exactly adapted to the genius of Christianity, and terms of connection divinely dictated, our author's argument will seem capitally deficient. Till then, it will be no better than, 'Because a connection between Church and State *divinely* legislated was safe, and suitable to certain circumstances, and a certain end; therefore, a connection between them, *humanly* legislated, must also be safe and suitable to opposite circumstances, and an end specifically different.'

Till then, I fear, every such connection, being of human device, will be accommodated to the humanly devised constitutions of the States where it takes place; and the Divine constitution of the Church must bend in accommodation. So that according to the tempers of human legislators, churches will be found, as they have been, Monarchial, Aristocratical, or Republican in their constitution. 'Tis added, "I think the Divine example warrants it." Surely this author cannot mean, that *legislation* in the Church, is the department in which we are to imitate the Divine example.

He farther argues, from the predictions of the glory and happiness of the New Testament Church: "The evangelical prophet introduces all the civil political characters into her train; kings, queens, kingdoms, princes, nations. *Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers.* The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.†* On the former of these

* Isa. xlix. 23.

† Rev. xi. 15.

these texts he reasons, page 49. "Is it possible that these expressions can mean, that at that happy era, the civil State shall, *in its official character*, pay no regard to religion, or make any distinction between Heathen, Christian, or Jew; piety or impiety, or even blasphemy; but shall only maintain peace and civil order among all the heterogeneous medley." On the latter, page 50, "Kingdoms, *in their civil and political character*, do enter, and are received into his kingdom or church." Thus also he glosses, Pf. lxxii. 10, 11. Zech. xiii. 9. Mic. iv. 2.

Such reasoning as this seems founded on mistake, and is inconclusive. The weight of the argument lays not on the simple texts adduced, but on such annexed qualifying glosses, "In its official character—In their civil and political character—In its political capacity." It proceeds on the supposition, That when we meet with an appellation denotive of office, character, or relation, we must always understand it as designed to express the exercise of that office, or the operation of that character or relation; and never as simply expressive of the person invested with office; or sustaining the character or relation, without regard to its exercise or operation. This supposition, however, would bewray a miserable inattention to the common use of language.

It would oblige us to suppose, when we read that five kings hid themselves in a cave, Josh. x. 16. that their hiding was in their official capacity, and a part of the exercise of regal office. When we read in the public prints, that *a king* hunts, or dines, or goes to church; we must understand that hunting, dining, and going to church, are parts of the exercise of the kingly office. When we are told, Mat. viii. 5, 8. that a centurion *befought* Jesus to heal his servant; we must believe that such *befeech-*
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ing is a part of the *centurion's* business in his official character. Thus, to worship Christ, would be a symptom of leprosy; for a *leper* worshipped him. To sit with him, or climb a tree to see him, must have been part of the office of a *publican*; for we know that publicans were so employed. Hospitality to an apostle, according to this rule, must have constituted a part of the art of *tanning* at Joppa; for Peter lodged there with one Simon a *tanner*.

On the same principle we would be led to believe, that the "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," to whom Peter addresses his first epistle, were organized into a flourishing *civil polity*, for he styles them, chap. ii. 9. "A holy nation, a royal priesthood." Such are a few of the absurdities into which the principle of this reasoning would lead us.

Indeed, to apply such glorious predictions as the above, to kings and kingdoms in their *civil political* character, rather than as *great men*, and the *multitudes* which inhabit a kingdom, is to tarnish their glory, and to suppose that God's thoughts are as our thoughts. The political idea of a kingdom contains a greater or smaller number, according to its constitution. The national actions of an absolute monarchy, and a monarch, are co-extensive. In otherwise organized nations, senates concur with princes and presidents, in national actions. Accordingly, the promise (Rev. xi. 15. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ,") would be fulfilled in such a nation as Russia or Prussia, by the conversion of one person, or a very few. In such a nation as Britain, the fulfilment would require a much greater proportion of the inhabitants; and in England a greater proportion than in Scotland; for in the former,

proportion of electors is greater. So we must suppose, that the conversion of a multitude was of no greater importance in the view of a promising God, and goes no farther to fulfil a rich promise to the church, than the conversion of one soul, provided that one be in a certain rank in civil society:—that worldly greatness or meanness are as much regarded by God, as they are by men. Such a view is too much favoured by our author, in part of page 49, above quoted, where he seems perfectly satisfied that the promise, “Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, &c.” may be accomplished; and yet the multitude be a heterogeneous medley of Heathens, Jews, and Christians; pious, impious, and blasphemous; if the civil state, in its official character, regard religion.

A similar idea seems admitted in the covenanting transactions of these nations. So we find much greater regard paid to the variety of ranks, among Covenanters, than their numbers. The National Covenant is said to have been subscribed, in 1581, by persons of *all ranks*; in 1590, by *all sorts* of persons: and again, in 1639, by persons of *all ranks and qualities*. The Solemn League too, is said to have been subscribed in 1643, and renewed in 1648, by persons of *all ranks*. In both, accordingly, the covenanters approached the throne of God, in all their worldly distinctions. “We noblemen, barons, knights, &c. with our hands lifted up to *the most high God*.”* The mention of ranks was, perhaps, partly intended as a defence against danger, and to render the deed legal in the land. It seems, however, also designed to render the deed *national*: that so, including the different parts of political existence in the nation, it might constitute

* This brings to mind Lucian's dialogue of Charon and Mercury, stopping the Shades.

tute the fulfilment of the promise, Rev. xi. 15.; and the nation in its political capacity, become a "Kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ." In this view, every part of the political existence was necessary to complete the idea. Every *rank* was necessary to eke out the fulfilment of the promise of God. Hence, we may sometimes observe hard struggles to prove, that though Charles I. did not actually subscribe the Covenant, yet he was forced to concur in the deed of the estates: as if the forced hypocritical concurrence of one individual, could render that a kingdom of our Lord, and his Christ, which would not have been so without such concurrence.

So highly do men value worldly distinctions; but not so the Most High. His thoughts are not as ours. He takes the beggar from the dunghill, and sets him with princes; and the highest rank in the kingdom of Christ to which the most eminent potentate on earth can attain, in relation to men, is to be *brother* to a certain beggar named Lazarus, who lay covered with sores, at a certain rich man's door, who desired to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, and whose sores the dogs tended. In approaches to God, such dignities and offices must be stripped off. With him royalty, nobility, knighthood, avail nothing. He stains the pride of all such glory, exalting every valley, and laying every mountain low, that He alone may be exalted; and that his people having one master in heaven, may acknowledge, in religion, none on earth.

That text, "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers," &c. cannot be properly applied to the "civil state in its official capacity;" for it is added, "and *their* queens thy nursing-mothers." It suited our author's design to suppress this relative *their* in his quotation.

quotation. 'Tis hoped he did so inadvertently. But this little word invalidates his whole fabric; for here no more is ascribed to a king in nursing the church, than was competent to *his* queen, who, while he lived, could not act in an official capacity, unless in extraordinary cases of state. Kings and queens, beside office and rank, possess often much wealth and influence. A text like this teaches to hope, that such great persons will love the church with ardour and tenderness, as a father loveth his children; as a mother yearns over her sucking child: that such will employ the influence of their personal example and friendship, and a due proportion of their private property, in behalf of religion: That consequently, in their official character, they will *gladly* vouchsafe to the church and her members, that protection which every other peaceable society and its members will enjoy.

This, contrasted with the times when the great ones of the earth employed all their wealth, influence, and example against Zion; when the blood of the saints was shed like water; when the mighty of the earth were filled with rage; when the saints were in jeopardy every hour; is a blessing worthy of divine goodness to bestow, and divine faithfulness to promise.

But to suppose the kingdom of our Lord, and his Christ, made up of such materials as the kingdoms of this world, *in their political capacity*, is inconsistent with its eternal nature. He shall reign on the throne of his father David, over the house of Judah for ever, Luke i. 33. His kingdom, therefore, must be made up of everlasting materials; not of Monarchies, Aristocracies, Republics, Majesties, Nobilities, Knighthoods, or Peasantries, which all must pass away; but of Men from all worldly ranks; all immortal; all eternal.

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To suppose so directly contradicts our Lord's preceptive declaration. When James and John affected dignities and ranks in the kingdom of Christ, He taught his disciples, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. *But so shall it not be among you.*"*

The promise will be accomplished in a nation, when the multitude of its inhabitants disregarding, in religious matters, their civil character; and casting their crowns before the throne of the Lord,† shall, with the dispersed saints of old, become a "holy nation, a royal priesthood—to shew forth the praises" of the Lord: and being "called out of darkness into his marvellous light,"‡ be fellow-citizens with the saints.

Having said so much to vindicate the word of God from what I reckon a perversion, a short view of his other arguments shall suffice.

Page 48. "Every civil state is, in its political capacity, a subject of the Divine law, &c."—Though they be, does that allow their officers to assume lordship over the conscience of others; or bind subjects to obey man rather than God?

Ibid. "Whence is it, that in every nation of the world—a connection has taken place between the civil character and—the system of divine worship. Each had its peculiar Gods."—From several causes:—From the state intrigues of crafty politicians, who, in concert with corrupted priests, and oracle-mongers, used to employ religious pretences for secular purposes: From corrupt ideas of the Deity, as if he were equally partial as man to particular regions: From the notion of divinities of limited power and knowledge: From the blasphemous arrogance of princes, who demanded divine honours

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* Mark x. 42, 43. † Rev. iv. 10. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

nours from their subjects, to deceased ancestors, or to themselves: From the mean idolatrous courtesy of subjects in particular regions, who worshipped their princes, or as they commanded: From that corruption by which men have perverted their ways, and “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.”—Must we imitate such?

Page 54. “I cannot but be displeased at those who would—set the two Testaments in opposition to each other.” This argument is equally pertinent and valid to prove the present duty of circumcision, &c. But said Jesus, “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me.”

Page 56. “Are we, if we choose, to be *released* from our *ordination-vows* by the Synod’s indulgence?”—“An oath—cannot oblige to sin—a vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath.”*

The remaining arguments seem addressed to the ignorance or *prejudices* of the reader, not to his understanding.

“Our Reformers—Scottish Martyrs—original Seceders—Messrs. Owen, Brown, Erskines, Guthrie, anonymous,” all taught so, and they had the Divine countenance. Was the Divine countenance never vouchsafed to any who in some points erred. They had the Divine countenance granted; so had Gideon. He, however, in will-worship made an Ephod, and all Israel went a-whoring after it.†—“Holding the traditions of the elders,—in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men;”‡ but we have a *more sure* word of prophecy, whereto we do well to take heed.—

These considerations do not exceed in weight the author’s quotation from his own sermon; or, “I have

* Conf. 22. 4. 5.

† Judg. viii. 27.

‡ Mark. vii.

have now been upwards of fifty-five years in the Secession.—This Testimony has been the standard of the Secession for near 60 years.—Leave Seceders on the ground on which they have stood for near 60 years.” Such arguing is forcible and common. It is also ancient. Shall Seceders be the advocates? Is this for the credit of—the Secession? Shall we, by altering our conduct, confess that we have been so long in an error? Our father Jacob drank out of this well. Was not the Church of Rome the first church, and Luther and Calvin *innovators*? We *have* loved idols, and after them we *will* go. Thus when men love the praise of men, more than the praise of God. They reject his commandment, that they may hold their own tradition, and many such like things they do.

“The spirituality of Christ’s kingdom has been highly extolled—by—Mr. Glas.—The system of Quakerism is likewise reared on this specious pretence. Stedfastness in the faith, *therefore*, calls for our adherence to—our Confession of Faith, &c.”—Satan often speaks true. If Mr. Glas. and the Quakers were so much worse than he, that they could speak nothing true, I must give up the tenet, because they held it. But perhaps they were not so very bad; and if not, should I abandon my own opinion, because others agree with me; and contradict myself, for the pleasure of contradicting others? I will rather say, Mr. Glas, &c. were right in this controversy; probably they were so in others. Or, if unbiaffed, Mr. Glas, &c. were neither always wrong, nor infallible: so their agreement makes the argument neither better nor worse. Yet thus to argue with our author, hath the merit of antiquity. “Can *any* good thing come out of *Nazareth*?—“Thou art a *Samaritan* and hast a *devil*.—Art thou
“also

“also of *Galilee*? Out of *Galilee* ariseth *no* Prophet.”

To decide whether the innovating party ought, or ought not to take our author's advice, page 52, and “Lay aside the name *Seceder*, is not my province.” No doubt, they have abandoned some of the primitive tenets; but they are not therefore less, but more truly *separate*, or *Seceders* from the present Church of Scotland.

As I perfectly agree with this writer, that “The very idea of a *National Religious Covenant*, is ingrafted upon the religious connection between Church and State;” ’tis needless to say any thing on that subject save a single observation, agreeing with him, page 53, That the binding obligation of such Covenants, lays on posterity with equal force and validity, as the supposed binding obligation of those vows in which parents engage as sponsors for their children at baptism, lay upon such children. It seems plain, that the latter is not more rational, scriptural, nor real, than the former; that while they stand, both must be supported by similar arguments; and when they fall; in the view of the candid discerning mind, both must fall together. Both rest on the supposition, that one man, without any special divine warrant, may at pleasure, constitute himself *proxy* for another, in a religious transaction with the Almighty.*

It is quite foreign to my design, to state a controversy with our author's political digression before-mentioned. If indeed, as a reader comparing it with his Title and Preface, would at first view be led to think, he intended by it to lug in to his assistance, the influence of the political disputes of the Day; and to expose his opponents to the odium of rulers, because they differed with him on a religious point; no terms of reprehension could be severe enough.

Thus

* See above, page 105.

Thus he would have been guilty of a dangerous slander, as he could not but know, that several of those whom he would style the innovating party among Seceders, were, and are of loyalty unimpeachable, and which defies suspicion. His known integrity of mind, and goodness of heart, however, forbid such a supposition.

Indeed, though he, and those who think with him, seem to hold theoretical doctrines, which, if reduced to practice, would lead them to use, for the propagation and maintaining of what they deem truth, external force, and even, *The last argument of kings*:* 'Tis scarcely credible that they could relish that very Covenanted Reformation, for which they are such ardent sticklers, were it just now to be again realized in all its ancient latitude and severity. Let us suppose the throne of Britain just now vacant, as it was before Charles II. The successor could not be admitted to exercise office; nor must the subjects yield him submission, till he would *swear* his allowance of the Covenants, &c.; and of all present and future acts of Parliament in their favour; †—to gainstand and *abolish* all false religions contrary to the same; ‡—to give the royal assent to acts passed, or to be passed, enjoining the same in all his dominions; §—to endeavour, in *his* calling, the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, schism, &c. || Let us suppose all inferior officers and legislators of State under like solemn oaths †; that the Covenants are enjoined under all civil pains;* that all presbyteries were bound to find out, in their respective districts, such as postpone or refuse, and notify their names ¶; that

* "Ultima ratio regum," the motto on Lewis XIV's great-guns. † Ch. I. and II. Par. 2. Sess. 2. Act 15.

‡ Ch. II. 1 Cor. Oath. § Ch. II. do. || S. League Art. 2.

↓ Act of Estates, enjoining S. L. Edin. 12th Oct. 1643.

* Ch. I. Parl. 2. Act. 5. ¶ Act Com. Assen. Oct. 11. 1643.

sheriffs and other magistrates, in city and country, were bound to aid the clergy in the scrutiny; and that all *postponers* and refusers, be esteemed and punished as enemies to Church and State, by confiscation of goods and loss of all office in the nation; and to be farther punished as his majesty and parliament, under such oaths, might appoint; and all excuse from ignorance precluded by public notice at the market crosses throughout the nation. Let us farther suppose, the Solemn League renewed, as in 1648 and 1649, not only to extirpate Popery and Prelacy; but with a special application to Independency, Anabaptism, Arminianism, &c.—This is the *plan* of the Covenanted Reformation.

What would be the *execution*? Let us only suppose the agents in this execution, [the Church and State officers, supreme and inferior,] to be punctual in the fulfilment of their oaths, and to proceed. In Glasgow, or any other city or great town in the nation, the clergy do their duty, summon the inhabitants to subscribe, and note the refusers or *postponers*. The state officers follow out the plan according to their oath and the law. They proceed (perhaps they must have a military force) and first shut up all the dissenting houses of worship. Then from street to street, and from house to house they pass. Many may have refused or postponed to subscribe the Covenant. Their property is *confiscated*; their persons *secured* to answer next parliament, and receive farther punishment. The king and parliament being under similar engagements with the other officers, must find them enemies to king and kingdoms, and punish them accordingly. Imagine how many good citizens would be ruined; rather imagine how few would not be ruined. Professors of Colleges, Religious Instructors, Bankers, Merchants,

Merchants, Manufacturers, Tradesmen. What havoc in Glasgow; in Edinburgh; in Perth; in London; in the country, by National Covenanting.

Would our author and his friends *wish* such a state of things instead of the present, in which every one may *worship* according to the dictates of his own mind; and any one may live in all godliness, and all honesty, none daring to molest or terrify him? Would they reckon it meritorious in the ministers of the Church, to reiterate such a process; and the officers of State thus to "take order to preserve unity?" Surely not. Why then such stickling for every item of the Covenanted Reformation? And why, for rejecting a few items, must persons be represented as confounding heaven and earth?

"But this account is exaggerated. Such a scene was never realized." Such proceedings the Covenants themselves, explained by the laws enjoining them, did certainly require. If it was not realized, this was because kings, state-officers, and clergy did not act up to their engagements. The thing, indeed, seems to have been impracticable, and so improper, that the violation of oaths was the better side of the alternative. The perjury, however, lay not in breaking the oaths and laws; but in swearing oaths which must not be fulfilled.* I have the charity to believe our author, and many who argue as he does, prefer the state of *things as they are*.

Not so his panegyrist. Because a religious society saw good, prudently to clear its conditions of admission, from some reference to a constitution of things, which has not existed in Britain, for more than a century past: this Anonymous affecting, and
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* The mode in which the Covenants *were* broken, being more intolerant than the Covenanted plan itself, is not here vindicated, but condemned.

only affecting to view the matter through a certain political medium, which colours every object with its own hue; in one of the public prints,* raises the malicious alarm, *The Constitution is undermining! Countrymen beware!* He inserts the whole preface of the piece we have considered, with this preamble, To the Editor.

“ Sir,

“ The public are so deeply interested in the *preservation* of our *civil Constitution*, and of our *holy religion*, that no apology is necessary for requesting you to republish the following Preface to a pamphlet very lately published.—The title of which is, *An Epitome of Religion*,” &c. He also illustrates the preface by notes.

Whose *holy religion*? The nation’s at present. The *Epitome* is treating, not of this, but of what was so 150 years ago.

Pref. They object against the connection between the civil State and the Church, as expressed in Confession of Faith, chap. 23.

Note. “ The title is, *Of the civil magistrate!*”—But what says it of him?—“ It is his *duty* to take order, that the truth of God (i. e. the doctrine of the Conf.) be kept pure and *entire*;—all heresies (i. e. opposite doctrine) *suppressed*; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline (i. e. every thing contrary to the Presbyterian system) *prevented or reformed*.”—Does the supreme magistrate execute this supposed duty? No; he leaves every subject to take care of his own soul, and every peaceable religious society to worship in its own way. At this the accused party rejoice; for this they bless God, and thank the king; since thus in worshipping according to conscience, they are protected.

For

* Glasgow Courier, Feb. 6, 1796.

For *this*, however, the Confession bears a standing charge of sinful neglect on the supreme magistrate. This charge, the accused blame and refuse to avow; but the same charge, this accuser urges, by urging this part of the Confession. Query. Will government thank him for that?

Pref. They object "also against *National Covenanting*."

Note. Contains a number of references to acts of parliament, mentioned in the preamble to the National Covenant, and a long extract from the Covenant itself, declaring the duties to which subjects bound themselves to the sovereign, all "*in defence and preservation of the aforesaid true religion, liberties and laws of the kingdom*." And would such persons as this, substitute the National Covenant for the present terms of the relation between ruler and subject? would they absolve all persons from subjection, unless the prince come up to the terms of this Covenant, in defending what was then called the true religion? A friend to "our Civil Constitution;" our "Holy Religion!" "The National Covenant," the 23d. chapter of the Confession. If the nation were to conduct itself to the prince on the terms of the National Covenant, and the prince to apply this Covenant, and chap. 23d of Confession to the church and the clergy; what would become of the present civil constitution, and of the present national Church of England; or even of Scotland?—Just such a friend to the State and Church, as the keeper had in that bear, which, to be avenged of the flies which were perching on his lips while asleep, brought a great stone and dashed on a number of them to kill them at once. Some flies were killed; but the fable says, the keeper lost all his fore-teeth, and had his jaws sadly bruised.

Does such an one not know that the National Covenants stand rescinded in the laws of the land; that he is on the same side of the same question, which the bishops took when they met in convocation, on the Bangorian controversy, and were dissolved by royal authority; that he is on the same side of the same question, which cost Lord George Gordon so dear. Has he the assurance, under pretence of loyalty, to appear so in Glasgow; where the Man most famous in the church, and for loyalty to the constitution, has so ably asserted and defended the opposite doctrine.*

He goes on insidiously, marking some words in Italics to strengthen his accusation. "*In the mean time, a high degree of secrecy is maintained by the whole party, and forbearance inculcated, and silence recommended.—Their own sentiments.—Silent.—Trivial circumstances.—Break off ministerial and christian communion with those who carry on, or connive at the new plan.* All this, concerning the Seceders altering their Formula, and a brother offended at their conduct, is no ground of alarm to the public; while they neither confer any political advantage on those they admit, nor prevent those they reject of any: nay, while they deprecate all such power. Yet thus such a person raves on, "understanding neither *what* he says, nor *whereof* he affirms."

But there seems more than mere ignorance here. However much ignorance we ascribe to this Anonymous, and such as he; (and he certainly demands credit for a large quantity) it will be scarcely possible to account for this appearance, without admitting into the reckoning also a large portion of *malice*. He seems to bear dissenters a spite, and is far

* Porteous' Sermon on Toleration, Dec. 10th, 1778, on Luke ix. 55, 50. "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," &c.

far from being scrupulous how he may give it vent. He endeavours to wrest the occasion now given him into an opportunity, and stabs in the dark. May he receive no better thanks from civil powers, than that person did who piously entreated a great prince to suppress the Secession, then at its rising—"They own me and my government; they pray for me and my government: What ——'s your business with me and my subjects?" May he get no better from the Church, than a brother got in a court in May 1795, who wished the Church to take order, that the laws be executed against dissenting school-teachers, and they compelled to take the oaths to government:—Silent neglect of the many, and the ridicule of some, as one who would be "A big, big, man."

Go thou, who wouldst kindle the beacon of civil war, by the faggot of persecution: bring down due vengeance on thine own devoted head. Nay, go learn to be a Christian, of him who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them—who is meek and lowly in spirit," and get rest to a soul weary with base devices.

APPENDIX II.

ON INFANT-BAPTISM, PRESBYTERY AND SUBSCRIPTION.

THE foregoing controversy suggested some Thoughts on Infant-Baptism, Presbyterianism and Subscription; or, the use of Creeds and Forms of human composition, common in Presbyterian Churches.

For some reasons, these shall be presented to the reader without the names, or many of the arguments of authors on either side of the respective questions.

1st, Controversial writers, when they cannot easily prove their point, or confute the opponent, often so perplex the argument, that its sophistry cannot easily be detected.

2d, The arguments of authors are neither a foundation for, nor have any claim, of themselves, to our faith.

3d, The knowledge of religious truth and duty, is competent to, and required of many, who have neither capacity nor opportunity to decide on the intricate arguments, and acute criticisms of learned authors; so these cannot be necessary to decide the argument.

It

It has been urged, that there is equally strong proof for a religious connection between Church and State, as for Infant-baptism; and for the obligation of National Covenants, as of baptismal vows on posterity: The latter, as well as the former, being founded on arguments taken from the Old Testament oeconomy. This led to inquiry; for as it seemed clear that the former was without foundation, if it be true, the latter must be given up. In considering the doctrine of baptism, for the purpose of establishing the common practice, it appeared, that

Baptism is a positive ordinance. A positive ordinance differs from a moral precept, in that the latter must be perpetually duty, and in all places; the former, though sometimes duty, and in particular circumstances, is on other occasions otherwise. The precept to honour parents is moral; was binding from the beginning, and is always so; but the ordinance of the scape-goat; the shape of the altar, &c. are positive. Farther, we can see often an utility and necessity in moral precepts, without respect to the commanding authority; but not so of positive ordinances. To abstain from theft is evidently useful; but without the ordinance, we could not see the necessity that the Nazarite should abstain from cutting his hair; or why the Altar and Ark must be of particular forms and no other. Hence moral precepts once made known, demand the consent of the rational mind that they must be so: Positive ordinances are more entirely a matter of revelation; many motives press the observance of moral duties; but the command of God is the *only* and entire reason for positive duties. Here, therefore, obedience is of the most *simple* nature. Such a positive ordinance is Baptism. There was a time when it was not a duty. No reason can be given for it, but the

Divine precept. Without respect to that, it seems totally useless, and is only the purifying from the filth of the flesh.

Baptism is entirely appointed. This is necessary to every positive ordinance. Neither the ordinance itself, nor any part of it, hath any special utility, except as expressly appointed. The appointment is that which constitutes the ordinance. Any thing observed *as* part of the ordinance, which is not appointed; or observed otherwise than appointed, is not the ordinance, because it wants what is necessary to its very constitution. So says God of an unhallowed observance, "Will ye call *this* a fast to "to the Lord." Says his apostle of that disorderly entertainment, substituted for the Lord's supper by the Corinthians, "This *is not* to eat the Lord's "supper."

Baptism must be entirely observed according to appointment. We cannot say of this duty as of charity, or justice; that if the end be gained, the mode is of small importance; for as its constitution depends on appointment, so the essence of the observance is agreement to the appointment. To this agrees the institution of the positive ordinances in the Mosaic dispensation: Sacrifices, altars, furniture, in number, number of parts and kind, must all be appointed. All must be executed according to a pattern shown, or a description given. The Passover must be observed, "In its *appointed* season, according to *all* the rites of it; and according to *all* "the ceremonies thereof;" and it was kept "according to *all* that the Lord commanded Moses," Numb. ix. 3, 5. The infinite difference between the authority of God and man, requires, that when any Divine institution is given, "we should not add "thereto, nor diminish from it."

Baptism

Baptism is an ordinance instituted by Christ, after his appearance in humanity. We do not say that an observance similar in external circumstances, was not practised before he came. We know that John did baptize, by Divine appointment, before Jesus began his public ministry. But the special end and meaning might be different, and the external observance the same; for the *meaning* and *end*; and *connection* of this meaning and end with the external observance, are all entirely of Divine appointment, as well as the observance itself. Hence this ordinance flows from Christ's supreme power in heaven and earth. "All power is given me in heaven and earth: go ye, *therefore*, baptize." We need not then perplex ourselves on this subject, with inquiries about the various washings practised by the Jews in adherence to the traditions of the elders; for these were vain human inventions: nor even those practised according to the Mosaic ritual. These all belonged to that "covenant which decayeth and waxeth old—ready to vanish away;" which, accordingly, was disannulled for its weakness and unprofitableness—"which stood only in meats and drinks, and *diverse washings*, and carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation." Nor need we perplex ourselves about the baptism of John in this inquiry; for it also differed, in special meaning and end, from the baptism which was instituted by Christ, and appointed by him to accompany the preaching of the gospel, in all places and periods, to the end of the world. Accordingly, neither the Jewish washings, nor circumcision, nor even the baptism of John, superseded the necessity of submitting to that baptism which Christ instituted, in those who believed on him after its institution. Though, of the believing Jews,

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all had observed the ritual washings, all had been circumcised; some had submitted to the baptism of John; yet they all must be baptized as Christ appointed. The acknowledgment of Christ's authority rendered this necessary. So we find, Acts xix. 4, 5. some, who, tho' they had been even baptized unto the baptism of John; unto repentance; into the preparation of the way of the Lord; the belief of the Messiah, and the kingdom of heaven at hand; must yet be again baptized unto the baptism appointed by Christ; into his death; into the kingdom of heaven already come, and maintained by the power of the Holy Ghost. The preaching of John and his baptism being, in their nature, preliminary and passing, and must give way to what was to remain: so about the time that the Christian dispensation commenced, Divine providence ordered that the baptism of John should stop. It had now answered its design. The Lord, whose way it prepared, was come. So he must *increase*, and his *fore-runner* must *decrease*. Elias came, and men treated him as they listed.

In the peculiarities of each dispensation, God said to his people, "*Obe*y my voice." His people obeyed. While the Jewish ritual lasted, they, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, walked "in *all* the commandments and *ordinances* of the Lord." When the baptism of John came instituted "from heaven," and while it continued; they, like Christ, would endeavour to "fulfil" this part of "righteousness." And when this was succeeded by the complete dispensation of Christianity, containing the ordinance of baptism, the *obedient*, like those at Ephesus, would, "when they heard," also be "baptized in the name of Jesus," the Son, and "hear" of the Father and of the "Holy Ghost."*

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* This gives no room for repeated baptism of the same per-

So then, the baptism instituted by Christ is not an ancient ordinance retained; but one instituted by his own authority. Yea, though a similar external observance had been previously observed, yet now being taken into an institution by Christ, it stands now on his authority alone. Christ says not, "The Jews have various washings; John baptized; therefore, go baptize:" but he says, "All power in heaven and earth is given to me, therefore, go—baptize." Christian baptism is a *peculiarity* of Christianity.

Our knowledge of this ordinance must be derived from the doctrine and example of Christ, and his apostles, exhibited in the New Testament. A positive ordinance of the Christian religion must be instituted by the founder of that religion, either in his own personal ministrations, or in the ministrations of those he employed in founding it. Now, as the New Testament contains the practice and doctrine of Christ and his apostles; we cannot go elsewhere for the knowledge of any of his institutions, unless where specially referred. But, as we have no reference elsewhere, with *respect to this ordinance*, we must rest satisfied with that account of it which the New Testament contains.

The institution of baptism is to be sought for in those parts of the doctrine and practice of Christ, and his apostles, which concerned baptism. Christ and his apostles did and taught many things beside. He instituted, at least, one other ordinance. We are not to seek among those, instructions for this ordinance. It would have been unreasonable, to have sought

for one under the Christian œconomy. John's baptism, being *preliminary*, is past for ever: There is now but *one* faith, and *one* baptism.

sought for the special rules concerning the observance of the Passover, among the directions given for the form and dimensions of the Ark or Tabernacle, or any where else, unless where the rules for the passover are designedly given. It seems equally unreasonable, to seek our knowledge of the *institution* of baptism, in those parts of scripture which treat of prayer and benediction; of marriage and divorce; of the passover and circumcision; or even of the Lord's-supper, or any where else, save where baptism itself is treated of. In *these parts* of scripture we will find directions how this ordinance is to be observed, and these directions must suffice. By such parts of scripture we must be instructed, therefore, concerning the nature, subjects, and mode of this ordinance: and thus it seems evident, that,

The doctrine and practice of Christ, or his apostles, RESPECTING BAPTISM, lays no foundation for infant-baptism.

We have one account of baptism, by the authority of Christ—*before his death*. John iv. 1.—“Jesus made and *baptized* more disciples than John.” Also, *after his resurrection*, in his commission to his apostles, related Matth. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” And in other words equivalent, Mark xvi. 15, 16.—“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.”

These texts give us the institution of baptism; but this institution is such as cannot admit infants.

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The first teaches, Jesus *made* and *baptized* disciples. They were first made disciples, then baptized. The lowest idea of a disciple, however, is one who at least is receiving instruction. One who cannot receive instruction, cannot be called a disciple.

The second text teaches the same,—that instruction must precede. “Go, teach all nations, baptizing them.” It is also evident, that the precept to *teach*, is of equal extent with the precept to baptize. The precept to teach all nations, however, cannot extend to such in the nations as were incapable of being taught, as infants must be, but only to such as were capable of receiving instruction, and being *disciples*; such as could be taught to “ob-serve all things whatsoever Christ commanded.” It would seem from this text, that those baptized were to receive instruction in, and from the very administration of the ordinance. They were to be baptized in, or *into* the name of the Father, &c. and so be somewhat instructed concerning these Divine persons. This is clearly intimated, Acts xix. 2, 3. When some professed believers, professed ignorance of the Holy Ghost, Paul asks, “To what then were ye baptized?”

In the latter text, quoted above, we find what proficiency in the doctrine of Christ is necessary before admission to baptism. “He that *believeth*, and *and is baptized*.”—We are sure that this text is equivalent to the other. Each is an inspired account of the same thing. There is, in those texts, no warrant for infant-baptism. The only supposed warrant is taken from the general expression, *all nations*. “Are not infants a part of the nations?” The apostles are commanded to teach *all nations*. Must they, therefore, attempt to teach infants. They were commanded to preach the gospel to
every

every creature. Must they, therefore, address the gospel to infants, to brutes, to inanimate creatures, to trees and stones? "But the command was to teach such as were *capable* of instruction; and baptize such as were capable of baptism." Infants are as evidently capable of being instructed, as of being baptized into the (knowledge of) the name of the Trinity; or, according to the rule, *He who believeth, and is baptized.*

These terms, "All nations, all the world, every creature," were intended to extend the commission of the apostles beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Beyond the extent of Christ's own personal ministry, who was not sent but to the "house of Israel," and beyond the commission of the seventy, who were restricted, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not." Now, they were to go into *all the world*, and teach not such Jews as they could find scattered in it, only; but every human creature capable of instruction.

This commission, and the promise of the Divine presence to the execution of it, was not limited to the ministrations of the apostles alone, for these did not extend to all the world, nor to the end of time; but is to be executed as the apostles were commanded, to the end of time, admitting of no change. They were to teach mankind indiscriminately, by preaching the gospel. He who was taught, *i. e.* who believed, was to be baptized. They who were baptized, must be taught to observe all Christian duties, and to maintain good works.* Such was the commission of the apostles of Christ; so they understood it, and so they executed it.

As far as scripture teaches, they baptized none but

* Mat. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. Mark xvi. 15, 16. Tit. iii. 8.

but such as appeared to be *taught*, and to *believe*.—Peter said, “Be baptized every one of you, in the name of *Jesus Christ*, for the *remission* of sins—*They that gladly received his word* were baptized.”* “*When they*” (who had been bewitched with the forceries of Simon) “believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of *Jesus Christ*, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon believed—and was baptized.”†—“Here is water; *what* hindereth me to be baptized? Philip said, *If thou believest* with all thine heart, thou mayest.—He said, *I believe* that *Jesus Christ* is the Son of God: and Philip baptized him.”‡

Peter said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which *have* received the Holy Ghost?—He commanded *them* to be baptized.”§ “Lydia, *whose* heart the Lord opened—was baptized, and her household,”|| which, in part at least, consisted of *brethren*.* Paul and Silas spake the word of the Lord to the Philippian jailor, “and to *all that were in his house*—He was baptized, he and *all his* straightway—believing in God with *all his house*.”†

Ananias said to Saul—“be baptized, *calling* on the name of the Lord.”‡ Paul baptized the household of Stephanas at Corinth.§ This household were qualified even to rule in the church.|| He baptized there also, Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, with all his house; and many others, who *hearing, believed*, and were baptized.†

Thus we see, that as the institution of the ordinance

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* Acts ii. 38—41. † chap. viii. 12, 13. ‡ chap. viii. 36, 37, 38. § chap. x. 47, 48. || chap. xvi. 15.

* ver. 40. † ver. 32—34. ‡ chap. xxii. 16. § 1 Cor. i. 16. || 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. † Acts xviii. 8.

nance of baptism does not include infants: so no recorded instance of the observance of this ordinance by the apostles, admits them; but every one seems fitted to exclude them; for every one, either by precept or example, requires that faith precede baptism. The households of the jailor, of Lydia and Stephanas, are alleged as affording examples of infants admitted. But the allegation is groundless. Can a household not exist without infants? There were none in the jailor's household, for the apostles would not address infants, as they addressed *all in his house*. The house of Stephanas, like the rest at Corinth, *heard, believed, and were baptized*, and were fit to minister and bear rule in the church: and must Lydia have infants, who does not appear to have had an husband. There seems to have been in her house, believing brethren. Such texts are only broken props to a falling fabric. There is no foundation for this observance, in either the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, respecting baptism.

But 'tis often said, "These rules and examples respected only adults." 'Tis true, every thing said respecting this ordinance, respects them only. The ordinance itself must, therefore, respect them only. To suppose otherwise, would be to say, that when Christ, the All-wise, was instituting, by a special law, an ordinance to be observed to the end of the world, he fitted that law to cases which he knew would occur very seldom; and to those only, neglecting entirely those cases, which must occur most frequently. All the recorded cases render a previous profession of faith necessary, and so suit adults. None of them dispense with it; so none suit infants. Why? Because the ordinance was not intended for such. The law of Christ is, in this instance, as well as every other, suited to all the cases for which

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it was intended; and fitted to continue to the end of the world: and those cases which it does not suit, were never appointed by it to occur. Christ's law is unsuitable to them, because they are contrary to it.

Those parts of scripture which do not treat of baptism, and have been urged as the ground of Infant-baptism, are of no avail to warrant it. Since a Divine warrant for infant-baptism, cannot be found in those texts of scripture which do treat of baptism; it would be vain to seek one in those parts which do not. Because baptism is entirely a positive ordinance, such an argument being analogical, could not avail. If it could, it cannot be found; for no part of scripture is inconsistent with others. Strange as it may be; and however shrewdly it may evince the penury of argument, where such aid is needed; such arguments have been adduced.

Paul exhorts the Colossians * to beware lest any should entice them by the *rudiments of the world*, and take off their attention and trust from Christ, in whom they were *complete*. Intimating, that they needed not circumcision, for they had all that it denoted; being circumcised by that without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh; and that Christ having completely finished the law of ordinances, and circumcision among the rest, he had freed them from obligation to it: he also declares how they attained this—by union to, and communion with Christ in his burial, which was denoted by their baptism; but really obtained by faith in God, who raised Him from the dead. On this is founded the theory, that baptism comes in room of circumcision; is subject to its rules, and like it, to be applied to infants. It is here intimated, that baptism

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* Col. ii. 8,—12.

denotes the same privilege with circumcision; or rather, since the former figures a transient, the latter a permanent effect; that as circumcision typified sanctification, baptism teaches how sanctification is attained. But though they had denoted exactly the same thing, it is no proof that the one must be in the room of the other. There is an analogy between Noah's flood and baptism.* This does not say that the latter came in room of the former. And though baptism had come in room of the other, it would not prove that their objects must be similar in every particular. The earthly Canaan typified heaven; the people of Israel, typified all true believers. The young Israelite, as soon as he was born, entered an heir to Canaan; the young regenerate, as soon as he believes, enters an heir to heaven. The young Israelite's entrance into a nation externally separate and holy, was denoted by circumcision; the young regenerate's entrance into the family of Christ, a truly holy nation, is denoted by baptism.

We are sure, however, that they did not serve exactly the same purposes in every respect. Circumcision served some ends which baptism could not. It, *e.g.* gave right to an earthly heritage, and subjected the person to a particular national oeconomy. Baptism does neither. They differ accordingly in extent. The former must be observed by all the seed of Israel, believers and unbelievers, though adult. The latter, when applied to adults, it is agreed by all, must be applied to believers only. Baptism is claimed by many for the children of believing parents only; but the male children, and home-born servants, of all Jews, whether believers or not, not only might, but must be circumcised. On the other hand, circumcision extended only to males; but

* 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

but baptism to both sexes alike. Seldom any but males succeeded as heirs in Canaan, and the whole family and nation must be of the church; but in Christ, there is neither male nor female; as there is no earthly inheritance attached to the profession of Christianity, as there was to Judaism. Indeed, Paul seems to have been ignorant of the doctrine, that "baptism comes in room of circumcision;" for in his epistle to the Galatians, when he is urging arguments against those who stickled for the latter, he never adduces this; though, had it been true, it would have been most pertinent. He declares to dissuade from circumcision. "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse. Behold, I Paul say unto you, if ye be *circumcised*, Christ shall profit you nothing.—Turn ye again to the *weak and beggarly elements*?—Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not again entangled with the *yoke of bondage*." Here circumcision is abrogated as an accursed thing; as one of the weak and beggarly elements; as part of the yoke of bondage; but not because baptism came in its room. Baptism is indeed mentioned* as belonging to *those who were* children of God by faith in Christ; but not as in the room of circumcision farther than as we have already seen; and so not equally applicable to infants.

"But this would abridge the privileges of the Christian church."—Is liberty from a painful operation; a beggarly element; a part of the yoke of bondage; that to which curse is annexed—is this an abridgment of privileges? If so, the want of the carnal inheritance must be a much greater abridgment. But this, doubtless, takes place. The child of God neither obtains for himself, nor his posterity;

rity, any worldly inheritance by his grace; as the Israelite obtained by his pedigree.

To support the argument from circumcision, is quoted the promise of God to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and *thy seed* after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant:—And I will give unto thee, and *thy seed* after thee—all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.—Thou shalt keep my covenant; thou, and *thy seed* after thee—every man-child among you shall be circumcised."* This covenant had a double prospect. That it related to the earthly Canaan, and was made good to the natural posterity of Abraham, is doubtless. But it had a farther and more glorious prospect, extending beyond the limits of earth to heaven; and beyond the boundaries of carnal pedigree, to Christ, and all the heirs of God in him. So Paul says of this promise, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."† So that all who are in Christ, Jew, Greek, bond, free; male, female; are *one* in Him; and being His, are Abraham's seed, and heirs of the promise.‡ To every male of the carnal seed, circumcision was necessary; but for the spiritual seed, the one circumcision of Christ supplies its place.‡ These are heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and so are baptized. None, however, are so, but the real children of God; real believers in Christ.§ 'Tis thus the blessing of faithful Abraham comes on the Gentiles. But to suppose an external covenant, into which persons are *barn* by carnal pedigree, tarnishes the glorious accomplishment of the promise, and opposes the word of God; for, as we have just seen, the

* Gen. xvii. 7, — 10.

† Gal. iii. 16. ‡ ver. 29.

‡ Col. ii. 11.

§ Gal. iii. 14.

heirs of the promise made to Abraham are those who are Christ's,* and are baptized, being the children of God by faith. † But such "are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," (as the children of believing, as well as other parents must be) "but of God." ‡ So then the ultimate prospect of the promise made to Abraham, was just salvation to every one who should become a child of God, and a member of Christ; and in him, a child of Abraham by like precious faith as his. To the former dispensation of this covenant, and to the enjoyment of temporal blessings, was circumcision attached, † but not to the latter. §

But supposing, for a moment, that an external covenant did still exist; that baptism and the supper were the *seals* of it; and infants of believing parents included in it; it would not follow that infants are, therefore, to receive these seals. Still the attachment of the seals would be *positive*; the mode of receiving them *positive*. Baptism must be received with *faith*; and the Lord's supper with *discernment* of the Lord's body. And if an interest in the covenant entitled to baptism, the same interest would entitle infants to the Lord's supper. They are as capable of *discerning the Lord's body*, as of *believing with all the heart*; and need as much to *feed* on him, as to be *ingrafted* into him.

To the same purpose are applied the words of Christ, "Suffer little children to come unto me, " and forbid them not: for of such are the kingdom of God." || Here it is worthy notice, that these children were not brought to Christ to obtain baptism; that He, nor his disciples, did not baptize

* Gal. iii. 29.

† ver. 26, 27.

‡ John i. 13.

§ Gen. xvii. 10.

§ Gal. v. 2.

|| Luke xviii. 16.

tize them; and that these words do not respect baptism. This text, if it proved any thing in point, would prove too much. It would prove that infants are to be admitted to come to Christ in all his ordinances; "forbid them not;" also, that all "little children," of heathens as well as of Jews; of infidels as well as of believers, were to be thus admitted to baptism; the Lord's supper, &c.—The access to Christ which he then allowed, was just what was then sought. He blessed them and departed. He also intimated that infants shall be found in the true kingdom of God; and that those who obtain it, must obtain it meriteless, meek, self-diffident, and void of self-righteousness, as little children.

From the whole passage, it rather appears that the disciples of Christ were strangers to infant-baptism; for as they, not Christ, used to baptize, * had they been accustomed to admit infants, why should they now rebuke those who presented them? But there is no ground for infant-baptism in this text.

Nor is there any ground for it in Paul's words to the Romans—"If the root be holy, so are the branches:"† and to the Corinthians—"The unbelieving husband is *sanctified* by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is *sanctified* by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they *holy*."‡ From these texts it is urged, that there is a holiness ascribed to children which is derived from their believing parents: and this cannot be moral holiness: it must therefore, be the holiness of church-membership, and entitle to all the privileges of the church.

Whatever be the meaning of these texts, this is not. Both are supposed to have the same meaning, and to found the same argument for the practice of infant-baptism.

* John iv. 2. † Rom. xi. 16. ‡ 1 Cor. vii. 16.

baptism. But if the child be *holy* by its descent: so is its unbelieving father or mother, by marriage to a believer: They too, are *sanctified*.—If the child's holiness constitute church-membership, its unbelieving parent's holiness will also constitute church-membership; and if an unbelieving father's holiness will not constitute him a church-member, neither will the child's holiness constitute it a church-member. The holiness of both are the same. Yea the child's holiness is derived from that of the unbelieving parent, as well as the other's. The *unbelieving* parent is *sanctified* by the believing, *hence* are your children *holy*.

But though children were holy, so as to be reckoned church-members; would that prove that church-ordinances are to be applied to them, or used by them, *otherwise than it is written*? Should they, *therefore*, be exposed to baptism by those who know not if they believe; or intruded to the Lord's table, by those who know not if they can examine themselves, or discern the Lord's body? Infants are equally incapable of faith, as of self-examination. If they possess the habit of the former, they may possess, also, the habit of the latter.

After all, the apostle is not treating of baptism, or of such outward church-membership, in either of these texts. That holiness of branches spoken of in the former,* belongs, in the Christian dispensation, only to such as *believe*. So, when this dispensation commenced, unbelievers could no longer retain a place among the branches: "for unbelief they were broken off."† By faith the Gentiles attain the state and character of branches: "Thou standest by faith."‡ When the seed of Israel shall be re-admitted to the state of branches, it will be by

* Rom. xi. 16.

† ver. 20.

‡ ver. 23.

by faith, not by pedigree. "They—if they abide "not still in *unbelief*, shall be grafted in."† So it shall be, when the "*Deliverer* from Zion shall turn "ungodliness from Jacob—that all Israel shall be "saved."‡

In the latter,‡ the apostle is not treating of church-membership, nor baptism; but deciding the question, whether a believing husband must put away his unbelieving wife; and a believing wife desert her unbelieving husband. He forbids the separation, and gives this as the reason, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, &c."

How does this reason apply to this subject? The same word, or words of similar signification, admit a great variety of analogical application. The word *holy*, is nearly related in meaning to *sacred*, *sanctified*, *sanctioned*, *legitimate*.§ We easily understand the sentences, "Private property is *sacred*: the marriage-bed is *sacred*." As we do those, "Marriage is the bed *undefiled*. A man's wife is more *sacred* than his goods." Why may we not understand this sentence, "The believing party, may not depart from, nor put away the unbelieving; for the husband, though unbelieving, hath been *made sacred* by the wife; and the wife, though unbelieving, hath been *made sacred* by the husband: else were your children spurious and illegitimate; but now are they *sanctioned* and *legitimate*."

The text may have this sense; and this sense seems suitable to the apostle's design; but whether it have this sense or not, it can lay no foundation for infant-church-membership and baptism; unless we admit that an adult also, while in unbelief, may be
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† Rom. xi. 23.

‡ ver. 26.

§ 1 Cor. vii. 14.

§ Holy (*sanctus*) affirmed by law, *sanctioned* (legal) legitimate.

a member of a Christian church; and may be admitted, while in unbelief, to baptism and the Lord's supper.

Are these things so? Is it true, that baptism is a positive ordinance; that it was entirely instituted; that it was instituted by Christ *after* He came in the flesh; that its entire institution must be learned from the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles; that the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles, *respecting baptism*, afford no warrant for infant-baptism, but exclude it; that the parts of this doctrine, not respecting baptism, brought in to support infant-baptism, are misapplied and perverted.—Search the scriptures.

If these things are so, infant-baptism must involve—the guilt of will-worship;—a reflection on the law of God as imperfect—an abetting of idolatry; giving, or requiring that observance and respect, which is due to God's law only, to an invention of men.

If infant-baptism has no warrant in the word of God, to baptize infants in his *name*, (which implies his authority), is to counterfeit his authority, where no such authority is;—to say, Thus saith the Lord, when the Lord hath not said; yea, where he hath said the contrary;—to tell a falsehood, and father it on Him;—to issue and circulate, though unwittingly, a forgery on the Holy Ghost. Would all those who practise infant-baptism venture to issue paper on a banking-house, in a case where mistake would be capital, on authority so slight, as that on which they sprinkle infants in the *name* of Deity? But the sanction of human laws is often more awful, because more forcibly realized in the mind, than the sanction of Divine laws: and so the counterfeiting of human writings is more anxiously avoided, than
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misconstruction, or perversion of the word of God.*

But if infant-baptism be not warranted in scripture, such perversion is not all. The command of Christ, and doctrine of his apostles requires, that believers should be baptized; but infant-sprinkling, being substituted in room of baptism, excludes this duty. Those who practise it then become liable to the reprimand, "Full well ye make void the commandment of God, that ye may hold your own tradition." They should beware lest they incur the dreadful sanction denounced against such as add to, or diminish from the word of God; for if infant-baptism be unscriptural, to practise it in the name of Deity, is both so to add, and so to diminish.

There are other arguments, beside those alleged from scripture, urged in favour of infant-baptism, and against believer-baptism, such as singularity, shame, complaisance to the world, or to the religious who differ from us, &c. Such arguments have much influence; but as they all come under the predicament of obeying man rather than God, they deserve little more notice than to have the absurdities which occur in the common practice of infant-baptism, set over against them.

Absurdities, observance, its ground and design, are different in different churches. Where sponsors are used, they are asked, and answer a great number of questions, as, "Does this child renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh?" &c. They answer in the affirmative, without hesitation, though they can know nothing of the matter. A parent oft professes his own faith to evince his child's right to the ordinance; but this profession is also *instead* of the child: hence it must be repeated as often as a child is presented; and hence he is bound to put the child

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* Good men are often fettered by their system.

salvation; and by others, as one effectual to these purposes. These views contradict truth; for the children of God "are born—not of the will of man." They oppose duty; for none but the regenerate believe; and none but the believing are to be baptized; so regeneration must precede, not be effected by baptism.

It is sometimes intended to declare the infant's church-membership and interest in the external dispensation of the covenant of grace. But what is church-membership? It is a relation incompetent to an infant. How is it that such persons, thus owned as church-members, even when adult, will not be admitted to full communion by the same church without a new profession of faith? By baptism they are *owned* members of the *visible* church, and yet evidently do not, in consequence, obtain one privilege in the *visible* church, save exemption from baptism when they grow up.—They hear the gospel, so may the unbaptized; they get a share in social prayers, so have others; they see the Lord's supper dispensed, so may the unbaptized: they are perhaps catechised, so may those of equal age though not baptized. The whole difference as to the *visible* church is, if the reputed baptized is to be admitted to full communion in the *visible* church, he professes faith, and a desire to be admitted, and is admitted to the Lord's supper; the unbaptized professes the same, and is admitted both to baptism and the Lord's supper. Really, when an infant is called a *member* of the *visible* church, the term is used in a sense quite different from the common; in a sense contrary to the very notion of a *visible* church. This is a society of *such* as profess faith in Christ and obedience to him. The infant has done neither. It could not obey, and where infant-baptism is used, no person can ever obey Christ's command

command, "be baptized;" for obedience requires a *willing mind*. And he is not permitted to obey his command, to eat the Lord's supper, till he give better evidence of his christianity, than his baptism when a child.—Profession is out of the question.

Accordingly, among Presbyterians, where infant-baptism is on the plan most improved of those in general use, though slavery to habit, and indistinct notions retain the practice of admitting infants members of the visible church by a baptism; yet religion and common sense interpose, and the infant is neither esteemed, nor treated as a member—is treated by the church, in no respect differently from that in which he ought to be treated, though he had been the child of a heathen, and never baptized. He can be only an invisible member of the visible church. Of so little avail is infant-baptism in the *visible* church.

To suppose it efficient to render the infant a saint, or member of the church *invisible*, involves the Popish absurdity above-mentioned: it also grants, that the infant participates benefits which he may afterward reject; for of those who have been so baptized, many do reject Christ. Yet it seems inconsistent to admit infant-baptism and deny such efficacy. Baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace. A seal should ensure existence in the particular case; but without such efficacy the seal does not ensure this. It cannot pretend, in any other way, on good ground, to declare the child interested in the covenant of grace. Such is this usage with respect to the church visible; such it is with respect to the church invisible. Well might the learned Witsius confess, that *the method of its efficacy is very abstruse*.

But if this usage is not warranted in scripture, how came it to be so general? 'Tis difficult to trace

the progress of thought in any invention. Many ancient Christians thought it absolutely necessary to salvation that all, old and young, should be *born of water*;* or be baptized: and also, that all should *eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of God*; † or receive the Lord's supper. Both these ordinances being thought necessary to the salvation of infants, were administered to them for this purpose. Baptism was thought necessary to, and effectual for, regeneration. It came even to have the same name. Said Justin, *Believers are brought to a place of water, and regenerated as ourselves*. Said Irenæus, *Christ gave (to his apostles) a power of regenerating to God*. But the scripture plainly required a profession of faith, previous to baptism: this infants could not yield. Here was a difficulty. To remedy it, a profession of faith, by proxy, or vicarious, was adopted as a good expedient. And to justify this substitution, it was necessary to suppose, and was supposed that the infant had faith, though it could not express it.

Thus, *before* it could be admitted to regeneration, it must appear to be a believer in Christ. This would not do. By and by, the child's faith is given up, and a vicarious faith, as well as profession of it, is admitted. Formerly, personal faith was supposed necessary to give the right to baptism, as those who have faith, are supposed to be regenerated already: this did not well accord with the idea that baptism is regeneration; and it took the business of regenerating out of the hands of the baptizer:—but now that personal faith is given up, baptism may the better appear to be regeneration; and the baptizer retains the trade of regenerating. As regeneration is connected with eternal life, this trade was important.

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* John iii. 5.

† chap. vi. 53.

In the church of Rome it became gainful; for there, as the efficacy of baptism depended on the intention of the baptizer, the priests had got the keys of the kingdom of heaven, for a great part of the world, completely in their grasp. Eternal life was now, not the gift of God, but the traffic of the priest. Here the matter stands in that church still. The account of it in the creeds of the Episcopal church,* also, seem to suspend regeneration on baptism, tho' many of her members have better sense.

Among most Presbyterians the idea of right upon the child's own faith seems given up. The parent professes his own faith as a proof of his child's interest, not in the covenant of grace indeed, but in an external dispensation of this covenant; and with respect to procuring admission into this external dispensation, the parent's faith and profession are vicarious. Thus the child becomes and remains, till he obtain admission to the Lord's supper, invisibly a member of the visible church. This theory of infant-baptism seems the *first* which employed the Covenant made with Abraham, Circumcision, the Holiness of the offspring of believers, &c. to support the practice. Those theories which admitted other proxies for children than their parents, needed other support.

The latest improvement seems to be that of those who reckon the presentation of children for baptism, a part of the parent's own profession of Christianity, and baptism a sacrament to him, not to the child; and therefore practise it.† Thus the observance has been gradually amended by alteration; a shrewd evidence that it is not warranted: for Divine institutions cannot change for the better.

The above seems the most rational account of the observance, among such as seek to *render a reason*

for their religious conduct. With the multitude, no doubt, the great reason for this, and other religious observances, is the *Fashion*.

On the scriptural *mode* of Christian-baptism, a few words shall suffice.

The Greek word *baptize*, with the two which signify *into* and *out of*, are most important on this subject. These words, it seems, are dissenters on the head of baptism, from the creed established in many religious societies, and are, accordingly, treated as Heretics. The first is not allowed a translation, and so not permitted to speak on the subject to a common audience, unless through a Greek muzzle. Thus, though he appears in the garb of a modern word, he would be quite unintelligible, (for through his muzzle he can speak nothing but broken Greek) were it not that sometimes *into* and *out of* assist him a little as interpreters in the context. If he be likely to be understood, the friends of the established creeds, as if offended at this, and as if they found them guilty of the same crime, put all three on the rack, and proceed to torture them into orthodoxy. During the process, these innocents are exposed to every tooth of the wheel of Criticism, while now and then the established creed is presented to them, that they may say (*credo*) *I believe*. The sufferers being immortal, cannot be killed by torture; and they, as often as questioned, express somewhat.—The whole process is conducted in Greek, or something which equally precludes all appeal to the vulgar; so those who conduct it, when weary with the scrutiny, proclaim, in language plain to the meanest capacity, “These words are orthodox—they have professed the established faith.” This, however, is so unlike their common mode of expression, that the vulgar hesitate, and sometimes venture to ask themselves,

selves, if they do really agree to the established creeds? The answer they give is often such as exposes them to renewed sufferings.

The King of the true church, however, never suspended the truth his subjects are bound to believe, nor the duty they must perform, on the decisions of intricate criticism; because he never designed to hang the keys of the kingdom of heaven at the belts of Critics, Linguists, and Jewish Rabbies. The words of his laws are so contrived and arranged, that the true meaning of each in its situation will be sense; the false gloss, nonsense. Indeed, it is by some such rule as this, that the learned themselves must proceed, in deciding the meaning of words.

The word from which *baptize* comes, seems originally equivalent to some of the English words to *drench*, *soak*, *steep*, or *wet*; and as most things when *wetted* change their hue; and it is by *soaking*, or *drenching* in a colouring fluid, that dying is commonly performed, it came to signify also, *to dye*. Accordingly, *baptize* must originally denote to *drench*, to *put a-soaking*, to *put a-steep*, to *water*: or, as applied to dying, to *colour*, *put a-dying*, or *dip*. Such seems to be the native meaning of the word in its original application. It, and all words in the Greek language which end like it, declare, not the *manner* of the action, but its *effect*. Both these views seem favourable to immersion; but every believer is neither bound to know all this about Greek analogy, nor to take my word for it. Whatever was the meaning of the word when first used, it might change it long before Christ came, and was now appropriated. Hence it seems as vain to determine the controversy, on its primary meaning, as it would be to attempt deciding a matter on the meaning of
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our English word *let*, which now is to *permit*; but 200 years ago was to *hinder*.

The matter should be rather decided by such expressions as these—Were baptized *in* the river of Jordan.*—Jesus, when he was baptized, went *up out* of the water. †—Jesus came from Nazareth—and was baptized of John *into* ‡ Jordan.§—He that sent me to baptize *in* ‡ water—He shall baptize *in* ‡ the Holy Ghost. ||—Ye shall be baptized *in* ‡ the Holy Ghost. †—And they were all *filled with* the Holy Ghost. †—Baptized *into* Christ, have put on Christ. ¶—Buried with Christ *in* baptism—risen with him.§

Will all these make sense with *pour* or *sprinkle*?—They had the river of Jordan *poured* on them.—Jesus was *poured* by John *into* Jordan.—He sent me to *pour upon* in water.—He shall *pour upon* you in the Holy Ghost—*Poured upon* into Christ, &c.—They were *sprinkled* with the river of Jordan.—*Sprinkled* by John *into* Jordan.—Sent me to *sprinkle* in water.—He shall *sprinkle* you in the Holy Ghost.

Let us now take our idea from a body such as sponge, *drenched*, *soaked*, *plunged*, *ducked*, *immersed*, or *dipped* in a fluid.—*Drenched* in the river Jordan.—Jesus when he had been *immersed*, went *up out* of the water.—Jesus was *plunged* by John *into* Jordan.—He sent me to *dip* in water.—Ye shall be *drenched* in the Holy Ghost.—They were all *filled with* the Holy Ghost.—*Drenched* into Christ.—By one Spirit are we all *drenched* into one body, and have been all made to *drink* into one Spirit. ||

The last of these methods of reading seems most reasonable. The common Objections are addressed to

* Mark i. 5. † Matth iii. 16.

‡ The most exact translations and most agreeable to the context. § Mark i. 9. || John i. 33. † Acts i. 5.

‡ Acts ii. 4. ¶ Gal. iii. 27. § Col. ii. 11. || I Cor. xii. 13.

to ignorance; for though twelve apostles could scarcely dip 3000 in a part of a day, these, with 120 brethren, might. The jailor might have water enough in his house at midnight, as well as others in such regions, who bathed daily instead of our change of linen. *Immersion* is not perilous to health. It is commonly used to infants, and to the sick, with advantage.

We have abundant evidence that baptism was performed by immersion in the days of inspiration. We have none that it was done otherwise. Which is more *safe*? To follow the divinely approved example; or the invention of man?

OF PRESBYTERY.

THIS form of religious society rests on the idea, that as all true believers constitute one spiritual body in Christ, the parts of which stand in mutual relation and subordination to each other, and are intimately connected: so all who profess Christianity, ought to be intimately connected in one external society or polity. For effecting such a connection, and maintaining the unity of a society, a representative government is necessary: officers to manage it; and a gradation of courts.

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It is accordingly thought that the divine institution of a church, contains the appointment of a certain order of Officers, who are to be permanent representatives in her; Courts to be made up of these officers, and a Subordination of these courts, that the whole may be one body-politic. The courts are called Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, Assemblies, and General Councils. The Session's power is over a single congregation. The Presbytery's extends over a number of congregations, &c. to the General Council, which rules the whole multitude of Christians, and all the subordinate courts.

The whole forms a beautiful idea of a republic, one and indivisible; and were the active powers of man's mind at all times in perfect unison with the unbiassed decisions of his understanding, would be more practicable and tolerable than it is. Still it would be, as it is at present, an important question,

*"Is this constitution, and the exercise of this power, agreeable to, and founded on the word of God?" **

The texts used to prove the affirmative seem insufficient. To prove that exclusive power which church-officers claim, and in which ordinary members

* This was suggested by the foregoing controversy concerning the inconsistency between Formulas, and the opinions of those who profess adherence to them. It was urged, and appeared true, that according to this system, such an evil, though it were proved really to exist, must not be attacked, but by carrying it to the courts, from the lower upward, in a regular series; and must be tolerated till the courts could get time to remove it in a regular way, which might be many years. Such toleration of sin, seemed itself sinful: and if the Presbyterian system rendered it unavoidable, it also must seem sinful; for certainly, whatever in human conduct renders sin unavoidable, must be itself sinful, and cannot be an institution appointed by Christ for building up his people in holiness.

bers of the church may not interfere, the words of Christ to Peter are quoted, Matth. xvi. 19. "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." 'Tis said, this grant of *keys* (or power) in the church, was made to Peter as the representative of church-officers exclusively, not of church-members. But Peter stood in three distinct capacities. He was an apostle, who must be an eye-witness of Christ's miracles and resurrection. In this office he had no successor. He was a teacher, or elder, in the Christian church. In this office he was to have successors. He was a believer in Christ. In this view he was on a footing with, and might represent future believers.

Now, if the grant was made to him, either as an inspired apostle, or as a believer in common with other believers, it will lay no foundation for that church power which church-officers claim from it. None of them now, would arrogate a power equal to his who said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I say to thee arise and walk;" or, such authority as his who said, "Thou hast not lied to men, but to God.—Behold the feet of them which buried thy husband, shall carry thee out." If the grant was made to him in common with other believers, it founds no claim to exclusive exercise of power in church-officers.—Let us consult the context.

The occasion of this grant* was common to other Christians with Peter. They, when they hear and learn of the Father, come to Christ, and say as Peter here did, "Thou art Christ, the Son of
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* Matth. xvi. 16.

“the living God:” and thus they are blessed * as he was. It is not the church under the consideration of her officers merely, but also under that of believers, that has the security against the gates of hell. †

Every one of them is a stone in that church, temple, or building without hands, as well as Peter; and as he was Peter (a stone): so each Christian is a *lively stone* in the spiritual building. Of this, this apostle seems to have been well aware. With this view, therefore, he solaces those to whom he writes. He, by his Lord, had been called a stone, *i. e. of the rock*. He addresses his second epistle “To them who have obtained like precious faith with us.” ‡ To such he says, “To whom coming as unto a living stone—Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.—Behold, I lay in Zion a chief-corner-stone, elect, precious.” || To them, therefore, who, like Peter, are stones in the spiritual building, built on the rock Christ, as he was, and professing faith as he did—to them, in the character of stones in the building, or church-members, is the grant and charter of power here made. It was in the character of Peter, not of Simon Bar-jonas, he received the power; in this he represents true Christians, so the grant is to them.

The truth of these views appears from a passage almost parallel, in Matth. xviii. 15—20, relating to the due exercise of this power or discipline. “If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone—if he will not hear thee, take one or two more with thee—And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let

* Matth. xvi. 17.

† ver. 18.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 1.

|| 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6.

“ let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a
 “ publican. *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall*
 “ *be bound in heaven—whatsoever ye shall loose on*
 “ *earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* If two of you shall
 “ agree on earth, as touching any thing they shall
 “ ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who
 “ is in heaven.—For where *two or three are gather-*
 “ *ed together in my name, there am I in the midst of*
 “ *them.*

The Presbyterians, who reckon the keys or power mentioned in the former text, to be granted to Peter as a church-officer, and in him to church-officers exclusively, understand by the word church in the passage, the judicative church, or court of church-officers. Thus, *tell it to the church*, is *tell it to the Session or Presbytery*. These, however, are not the words of Christ, and seem not to express his mind. The person who is to tell the church, is evidently a member of the church to which he gives the information, one of them to whom the Lord says, “ What-
 “ soever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in
 “ heaven.” And in that church aids, or is the principal agent, in binding and loosing.

Those to whom the Lord says, “ If two of you
 “ shall agree, &c.” are the same, and addressed in the same capacity as those to whom he says, “ What-
 “ soever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in
 “ heaven.” To whomsoever then it is competent to reprove his offending brother, either by himself alone, or with one or two more; or, to bring him before the church; to whomsoever it is competent to concur with another, in asking a boon from the heavenly Father; to him it is competent to bind on earth with a bond, valid in heaven, and to exercise, along with others, the *keys* of the kingdom of heaven. He does exercise these keys, when, accord-

ing to the rules of scripture, he admonishes an offending brother, and brings him, if obstinate, before the church; and when he concurs with the church in rejecting or restoring. Yea, though the matter never had come before the church, and the first admonition had been successful to gain the brother, the loosing would have been as valid as the restoration in the church. It would be a real exercise of the keys. On the other hand, if the first admonition be unsuccessful, in prosecuting the matter to a second, and even to the church, the offended, regulating his conduct according to the divine rule, doth so far exercise the keys, and bind. The whole is in the kingdom of heaven, the church, and respects relations and privileges in her.

These observations are confirmed by the last words of the last quoted passage: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." To whom was this promise addressed? To the disciples as church-officers, and to church-officers only, to the end of time; or to the disciples as Christians; and with them, to every two or three Christians who should meet in his name? But to those to whom this presence is promised, to them is granted also the power of binding and loosing. They share in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This power, therefore, is so far from being the exclusive right of church-officers, that it may be exercised, in a certain degree, wherever two or three agree, meeting in Christ's name. Both these texts, therefore, and especially when they are compared, are rather hostile than favourable to Presbyterian government; and these texts comprise the rules given by Christ to his disciples on the subject.

Indeed the apostles were vested with a power of retaining

retaining and remitting sin, after Christ's resurrection, when he *sent* them, as the Father had *sent* him, and caused them to receive the Holy Ghost.* This seems to have been vested in the apostles alone, as none since the days of inspiration ever obtained such mission: perhaps this forgiving of sin was equivalent to healing diseases, as we know that the apostles had the power of healing diseases conferred on them. And this our Lord declares to be a proof of authority to forgive sin on earth, Matth. ix. 6.

As a foundation for the exclusive power of church-officers in church government; for the series of courts; the appeal from the lower to the higher; the authority of the higher to make decrees obligatory on the lower; and the duty of submission to such decrees—indeed, for almost the whole system of Presbytery, the fifteenth chapter of the Acts is alleged.

In this chapter we are told, that there arose a dispute at Antioch, whether the converted Gentiles must be circumcised. That after much disputation, Paul and Barnabas (who seem to have been on the negative side of the question) were sent to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question—that the question was, after some consideration, determined in the negative; and the decision with other articles connected with it, were sent to Antioch, and there received gladly. The meeting at Antioch is reckoned to answer to a Presbytery; that at Jerusalem, to a Synod; and from these two terms the series is carried upward and downward. There are, however, some circumstances of difference between the proceeding here related, and that of modern Presbyteries and Synods. Those, perhaps, were such as render the former useless as a precedent for the latter.

The appeal was made (if it was an appeal) to inspired apostles, to men who were endowed with the Holy Ghost.* Others, beside the apostles and elders, took a share in the discussion. Hence the whole multitude kept silence to give audience to Barnabas and Paul.† The multitude had been speaking. The decree, if it was a decree, was not sent in the name, and by authority of this supposed Synod of church-officers. It pleased not only the apostles and elders, but also the *whole church*.‡ This decree, or advice, intimated all this to the supposed Presbytery. “The apostles, and elders, *and brethren*, unto the *brethren* which are of the Gentiles.—It seemed good to us, being *assembled with one accord*.||”

But farther, this advice had one ground of authority, and one authenticating clause which no modern acts of Synods can produce nor contain. “It “seemed good to the *Holy Ghost* and to us,”† (the apostles, elders, and brethren). After all, the decree was not sent in the dictatorial air of a command, but, “If ye abstain—ye shall do well.”§

Our modern Synods have no inspired apostles as this had. They do not admit the brethren to join in (sometimes not to be present at) the discussion as this did. They do not send decrees as from the whole church, and bearing that they were agreed to by, not only church-officers, but ordinary church-members, as this assembly did; and they want the power of declaring the concurrence of the *Holy Ghost*, which this assembly had. Yet their acts are often delivered in a more dictatorial tone, than the decision of the Holy Ghost, the apostles, elders, and whole church at Jerusalem.

Surely then, modern Synods and assemblies are
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* Acts xv. 6. † ver. 12. ‡ ver. 22. || ver. 23—25.

† Acts xv. 28. § ver. 29.

formed according to some other model than this assembly at Jerusalem: and we cannot easily believe that Presbytery, as we find it, is agreeable to, and founded on this part of the word of God.

But it is said that Paul and Silas delivered to the churches the decrees to keep, which had been ordained by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.* These were the same decrees mentioned in the preceding chapter. We have already seen that these were ordained by the apostles, and elders, and *brethren*: also, that they seemed good to the *Holy Ghost*; and so can be no precedent for a similar authority in, and deference to modern Synods and their acts.

The foregoing are the principle texts urged in support of that peculiarity of Presbyterianism, called Subordination of Courts.

The distinction of elders into teachers and rulers, is of small importance in this inquiry: as both these supposed classes are evidently of one congregation, and as both classes are rulers in governing, which is the subject of inquiry. Hence, though the distinction were granted, it would make nothing for Presbytery. This distinction, however, seems but slightly founded, or rather totally unfounded. Teachers and rulers are often the same.—Teaching and ruling are often the same.† All the elders of a church are pastors; must *feed* that church, it would seem, not only with government, but also with the sincere milk of the word.‡

But not only is modern Presbytery unfounded in the word of God.—The system is incompatible with those social duties which God hath required of a church. The very nature of our duty to God seems to exclude the idea and possibility of delegation and

* Acts xvi. 4. † 1 Thess. v. 12, &c. ‡ Acts xx. 17—28.

representation, unless by express Divine appointment. It requires to be done as before God, and with the testimony of conscience. But Presbytery is founded entirely on such delegation and representation. So when God commands Christians to a certain social duty, they devolve it on a Session or Presbytery. When he commands them to turn away from the ungodly, and so to judge with whom they are, or are not to hold communion; they say by their conduct, nay, but our Session will judge this matter for us, and if it be litigated there, the Session, whose duty it was lately held to be, devolves it on the Presbytery. Probably it may go to Synod, and there be decided against a reclaiming part of the congregation immediately concerned.

Thus reclaiming persons may be forced, under pain of excommunication, to receive an accused person into their communion, by an assembly sitting at an hundred, or several hundred miles distance from the scene of the supposed misconduct, and the residence of the witnesses. Such things have been. But Paul ordered matters otherwise at Corinth. He commanded the church, "When ye are gathered together with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one to Satan—do not ye judge them who are within?—Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person."*

Was this address and command to church-officers only, or to the church-members in general. If it was to the former, it follows that the incestuous person was such an officer, for, "There is," says he, "fornication among you." 'Tis evident the whole church was here addressed, and none might shift:

* May not this be the power of binding, and mentioned, Matth. xvii 18.

shift the toil or odium of the duty, or delegate another.*—He ordered things otherwise in Thessalonica too.†—Indeed this system seems to admit an evasion of Christ's commands; and a subjection to human authority which he hath forbidden. It is, accordingly, not only unfounded in the ordinances of Christ, but subversive of them, and is inconsistent with a conscientious personal regard to purity of church-fellowship.

Even viewed as a human system of government, Presbytery seems rather exceptionable. In well constituted states, it has been thought necessary to put legislation, and the execution of the laws, into different hands. Here they are committed to the same. Church-officers both make and interpret the laws; and also see them executed. They are but men, and so are in danger of making or interpreting them in accommodation to what they wish to execute; or to execute improper laws once made, because they are their own. Thus, acts will often be executed, rather because a court of Christ hath enacted them, than because they are the mind of Christ.

Farther, to keep judges and party entirely distinct, hath been always an object to all lovers of impartial justice; but Presbytery often confounds them. When the case concerns the exercise of church power, whether it be a remonstrance by a church-member against the deed of a court; or an appeal to one superior from an inferior; whether it be a complaint of an inferior court to a superior, against such as may have refused due submission to its authority; still it is a case between church-officers and church-members; and all the judges are of the former class. If they decide against the court, they are in

* 1 Cor. v. 4, 5—12, 13.

† 2. Thess. iii. 6.

in danger of acting in a way unfriendly to church-power even in their own hands, and of encouraging a spirit of anarchy among the people. These views may have often a greater influence, than the merits of the cause, in framing the decision. We may thus see why a remonstrant, or appellant, often loses his cause in a superior court; and why the complaint of an inferior court is so often redressed, and its sentence affirmed.

It is because the one party is of the same order with the judges; the other of one different, and deemed inferior. This produces a clashing of what is supposed interest; the church-officers endeavouring to retain and confirm their power; the church-members to have it lessened or restrained. Symptoms of such a struggle may be seen in most Presbyterian churches. It is a pregnant source of animosity; often the bane of Christian love, and the nurse of corroding jealousy between pastor and people. Such is the nature and tendency of that power by which church-courts govern the church, and by which they "*authoritatively*"* suspend persons from, or admit them to her most distinguishing privileges; and determine on complaints against mal-administration.

The same courts claim also a power, "*ministerially* to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience."† Their power seems more exceptionable in this view, than in the former. For here they determine not only how a man is to act, and how he is to be treated outwardly; but, as it were, interpose between man and his Maker, and dictate what he is to believe. It is true, they do not profess so to do, nor perhaps mean so to do; yet what they do, seems equivalent.

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* Conf. 31. 3. and Form of Church Government. † *Ibid.*

It is said the decrees of courts, *if consonant to the word of God*, are to be received with submission, † &c. This seems, at first view, to remove the exceptionableness of this power; but when the matter is viewed more closely the case alters.—Whether are the courts themselves to decide, whether their decrees are consonant to the word of God; or, are those who are to receive these decrees, to judge of this every one for himself? The latter supposition, in a great measure, destroys the idea of authority and submission. We are to submit to decrees as far as we think them right, *i. e.* as far as we please. This seems not to be *submission*. This absurdity is avoided; the courts themselves judge whether their decisions are, or are not, right.

They generally affirm the decrees, and bind the church-members to the former decrees; and also to their sentence, that those decrees are consonant to the word of God. And thus they bind them under sanction of excommunication. But it will be said, Presbytery does not bind any person to become a member, and subject himself to such rules. He must, however, either so submit, or be excluded the church. *This system* affords no alternative but submission. If it were carried to the extent at which it aims, it would bind the consciences of every man, under pain of excommunication, to subjection to the decisions of all the clergy in the world. And when the censures of the church were fortified with the power of the civil magistrate, according to the Confession of Faith, ‡ excommunication was no light matter. Here was an authority *in man*, to determine what was religious truth and duty, and to enforce profession of assent to this supposed truth, and

† Conf. 31. 3. and Form of Church Government.

‡ Conf. 20 and 23.

and the external performance of this dictated duty. The system affords no room for appeal in the church, after the decision of a supreme court of Christ. And if the church be established, the state can yield no relief. To an impartial inquirer, such a plan will perhaps appear improper. It is often counteracted, even by many who profess to hold it. Individuals, sometimes, presume to judge whether the decrees of the courts are, or are not consonant to the word of God. If they determine in the negative, they will refuse submission, and be of course excommunicated. If they are a competent number, and are in a tolerant country, they will set up for themselves; make decisions, blame, and excommunicate those who will not submit to their court of Christ of the last resort. Thus the same persons may be found, at one time, acting as if every person were to determine for himself, whether the decrees of courts are scriptural or not, and as if the authority were a mere nullity; at other times, acting as if it belonged to these courts to determine matters of faith and cases of conscience. In the former case, the authority of scripture is urged; in the latter, the Divine institution of church power.

Thus the Pope, or his council, would argue for his paramount power to fix the meaning of scripture; make additional canons, and enforce subjection to them: thus Prelates make liturgies, homilies, and articles; appoint ceremonies, and decree the observance of them: and thus Presbyterian courts pass sentence in discipline, determine the meaning of scripture, and require, under pain of excommunication, submission to their sentences, and assent to their Creeds and Formulas.

Here we are led to treat of *Subscription*.

OF

OF SUBSCRIPTION.

HUMAN Creeds contain, in a connected view, the meaning of scripture as decided by church-courts. Formulas exhibit the mode appointed by such courts for expressing assent to, and approbation of, the Creeds. As these courts are said to constitute the church-judicative, and to be the mouth of the church laic; the Creed is called the church's Creed; the Formula, her Formula. Accordingly the assent to, or subscription of the Creed, by a verbal or written Formula, is a term of fellowship in the church. Sometimes, however, the Creed is neither faultless, nor its blemishes unseen by the assenters.

This seems unavoidable, in case of such a Creed used by a numerous body. The fabrication of it was the work of the church-judicative; its alteration must be so likewise, and cannot be obtained suddenly. So then, either such *use* of Creeds and Formulas is radically improper, or they claim profession of full assent, though they should contain, and be known to contain some faults and errors: and if the subscription, or solemn avowal of articles of faith, which a person does not believe, be an egregious sin, such an use of Creeds is also a sin: for none will deny, that whatever renders the commission of sin indispensable, is itself sinful. Thus the controversy, which arose from the adherence to faulty parts in public Creeds, led to question the propriety of human standards altogether. And such an use of such Creeds seemed improper: because,

Such standards, as tests of orthodoxy, are unwarranted in scripture.

The

The command to Timothy, to "Hold fast the *form* of sound words," affords no warrant † for them; for this was a form, which, adds the apostle, "thou hast heard of *me*." It was a form divinely inspired, and quite of a different class, than any modern confession. As there is no warrant in this text for such adherence to Creeds and forms, so there seems to be none sufficient in any other text; for,

This use of human standards involves a reflection on the perfection and sufficiency of scripture.

Paul addresses this same Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the scriptures, which *are able* to make thee wise unto salvation." Now if the scripture is able to make wise unto salvation, why should we go farther. But it is said, though the Bible be sufficient for the salvation of an individual, it is not expressed with sufficient precision for preserving purity of communion. Paul seems to have thought otherwise. When knowing that his brethren should see his face no more, and anxious that the church might be kept from the ravages of the grievous wolves, whose approach he foresaw, and warning them to watch against such of themselves as should arise, speaking perverse things; he commended no test of orthodoxy but the Bible.— "Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the *word of his grace, which* IS ABLE to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." If any circumstances required human standards, those mentioned in the preceding context did; yet, here the apostle, in the utmost anxiety to ward off that evil against which such standards are provided, and on set purpose, prescribing an antidote against said evil, not only omits to commend such tests of orthodoxy, but
virtually

† 2 Tim. i. 13.

virtually declares them unnecessary. The word of God's grace *is able* to build up not only an individual, but a church. This passage† seems for a thousand arguments against human standards. But where Paul says the word of God's grace *is able*, those who insist on the use of such standards, practically say, "This word *is not able* to build up," &c.

It is readily granted, that every church should endeavour that all its members should agree in respect of the meaning of scripture. This is, however, as we shall afterwards see, equally attainable without, as with such standards.

Farther, this use of human standards involves a lordship over the faith of the church, in those who frame them, and a submission to such lordship in those who use them.

When they are to be framed, the framers are entrusted to decide what the church shall, and shall not believe; or, which is equivalent, in what sense the scriptures are to be understood. They are, therefore, not properly the scriptures and Christ speaking in them; but the scriptures as those employed shall make them speak, which are to be the sole rule of faith. Thus, those who admit others to frame standards, submit to these framers as the lords of their faith.

This appeared evident in letters addressed to the National Synod of Protestants in France, 1617. "We promise before God to submit to *whatever shall be* concluded in your holy assembly; to obey and execute it to the utmost of our power, being persuaded that God will preside among you, and guide you into all truth and equity." In 1578, matters had been carried even farther, provincial Synods there, were to appoint deputies, who were impower-

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† Acts xx. 17—32.

ed to treat of, and agree in all points of doctrine concerning union. The Formulary was either to be sent back to the Synods to be examined; or entire trust was to be placed in the four deputies. *

In such proceeding we find a sample of that submission required, and yielded on such occasions. The declaration and promise were more explicit in words than is commonly the case; but the language of practice is still the same. Thus, when the General Assembly at Edinburgh sends Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly; it "generally authorizes them *to do all things* which may further the so much desired union, and nearest conjunction of the two churches of Scotland and England, conform to their (the Assembly's) instructions aforesaid." 'There was no inquiry in any of these cases, whether the common people would agree. They must agree to whatever the courts would determine, or else be excommunicated, and perhaps endure the civil pains annexed to this censure.

The Creed, framed on such authority, is maintained in stated use by the same. When once framed without any interference of the laity—the great number whose faith it is to be, it is approved and enjoined on them by the authority of the courts, without consultation, or inquiry whether it be really their faith. In the same manner, the same profession remains supported and maintained by the authority of the courts for the time being. Thus matters stand till it appear expedient to have the standards altered.

Now, the same authority and the same submission make a new appearance. Though some things untrue be observed in the standards by private persons, they must not refuse their adherence to them: if

* Robinson's Life of Claude.

if they do, they cannot be retained in fellowship. There is no provision within the church for them. He who disavows a part of the standards, must do so without the church. By and by, some one of the clergy, perhaps, discerns the blemishes in the Creeds. Yet he must both adhere to them as before the discovery, and also require of others this adherence. The Formula cannot be dispensed, or if it be, such dispensation must be clandestine, for it is irregular. Even after a number of office-bearers in the church have seen individually the faults or errors in the standards, and after these may have been matter of discussion in the courts; if those courts be not ripe for the alteration, it must be deferred, and the same profession of adherence continued; for the authority of the supreme court is necessary in altering any part of a public profession, and uniformity must not be violated. All this while, the laity must profess adherence to the standards according to the Formula.

At last the courts ripen. The standards, or Formula are altered. Adherence to the alteration, or to the forms in their altered state, is then required by the courts, and yielded by those under their inspection. Thus, in the former part of a season, perhaps, an adherence is given to one set of propositions; in the latter, to a set in some respects opposite; and both by authority of the same courts.

Now, if we take it for a maxim that profession and belief should never disagree, we will not wrong the courts by alleging, that in prospect of such an alteration they practically say to their subjects, Ye must believe this way for a few, perhaps three or four months, and after that, a different way, which the courts will dictate. When the change is made, they practically say, What you have believed hitherto, you must believe no longer; the court has altered the Formula; but you must believe according to

this alteration, till the courts shall order otherwise.

Were profession and faith concordant, this would be just reasoning; but if it be alleged that only the profession, not the faith, is subject to these courts, then it will follow that these courts can dispense with the agreement of faith and profession—that they can give a dispensation for insincerity. Indeed, no other supposition seems sufficient to justify the proceeding of a church, when, for example, it is altering a chapter of its Confession of Faith. As soon as the alteration is projected, it is taken for granted that something in it is disbelieved, else the alteration would be unnecessary. Yet the courts order—Till—ye must profess to believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession. After—ye will be permitted to alter it. When the change is accomplished—Ye must not now profess to believe the “*whole* doctrine of the Confession;” but only as “*said* Confession is received by this church;” or according to the declaration of—Synod, dated——.

Here the Papist retorts on the Protestant. The latter denies the necessity of the supreme authority of the church, for determining the sense of scripture. The former argues thus, The supreme authority of the church is so obviously necessary to determine the sense of scripture, that the pretended reformed (Protestants) themselves have recourse to it. So the Synod at Charenton, 1644, treated Independents just as Papists would. It allowed no private judgment; but insisted, on pain of excommunication, that every religious dispute must be referred to Conference, Consistory, or Synod, provincial or national: and from this last there is no appeal. “This submission” (says the acute Papist) “is as absolute as we” (of Rome) “demand. The

Indepen-

Independent takes his own sense of the scripture, but *you* and *we* are guided by the church's." Thus too in letters to the National Synod, 1617, as above: "We promise, before God, to submit to whatever shall be concluded in your holy assembly, to obey and execute it to the utmost of our power, being persuaded that God will preside among you."

What more complete submission doth the Catholic render to the Pope? Thus successfully did the Papist argue against the learned and faithful Protestant.*

Such submission seems unwarranted.—My Creator gave an understanding to me, as well as to Pope, Bishop, or Presbytery; and called me to judge for myself as well as they can. Christ brought my charter from heaven; gave me the rule of faith and practice, and commanded me to call no man master.

Again, *this use of human standards involves the danger of insincerity and duplicity in those who profess adherence to them.*

Human compositions must be imperfect. Most probably they will contain errors. These will be discerned, by different persons, with different degrees of ease and clearness. The standards cannot be immediately abandoned, or purged, as soon as a fault appears to an individual; for a change must be made by the supreme court, and it cannot at once agree: and besides, by such frequent alterations the standards would lose their importance. Ministers, therefore, and others, must use the standards after their faults are seen, as before. But what is that use?

They adhere to them by Formulas. Thus the decisions of the famous Synod of Dort, were adopted by Synods, Universities, &c. by professors, pastors, elders,

elders, under pain of incapacity, in solemn oath. "I do swear in the sight of God—that I do—approve of—all the doctrine taught—in the national Synod of Dort, as entirely conformable to the word of God.—I do swear—moreover, to persevere, during life, in the profession of said doctrine, and to maintain it to the utmost of my power—and neither in pulpit, school, nor writing, will I depart from THAT RULE: So help me God, and be merciful to me, as I swear all as above, without any equivocation or mental reservation."†

If any of those who swore this oath did *disbelieve* any one article in said decisions of the Synod of Dort, however venerable his name might be, his oath was an *untruth*. If one should swear an *untruth* in a civil court, what would be the name of the crime? What would be its punishment?

Subscriptionists of various denominations adhere to their respective forms, as firmly and as solemnly, as those above-mentioned adhered to the decisions of the Synod of Dort.

If a Papist does not *intend obedience to the Pope*; if he does not *really believe all the doctrines taught by his church*; if he does not *resolve absolute submission to all the positive institutes of councils, particularly those of the Council of Trent*; if he does not mean to *persevere in this profession to the end of life*; when, in solemn oath to each of these articles, he invokes to his aid, God and his Holy Gospels; what is his oath? How would such an oath be estimated and rewarded, if taken in a civil concern?—

Were a person for post or pension, or on any other motive, to swear belief of, and adherence to the Thirty-nine Articles, while he knew not, or disbelieved their contents; what would his oath be?

Would

† Robinson's Life of Claude.

Would it be truth, or the contrary? If it respected civil matters, what would be its reward?—

When a Presbyterian in solemn OATH at ordination, or receiving licence, professes “sincerely” to “*own and BELIEVE the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, approved by the General Assembly—and ratified by law in the year 1690, to be founded on the word of God,*” and to “acknowledge the same as the confession of” his “faith;” and promises that he “will firmly and constantly *adhere thereto—and assert, maintain, and defend the same.*”† If he *disbelieve* any part of this *whole doctrine*—or intend to withhold *any part* of the promised adherence and defence of *any part* of the same—What is his oath in the plain unequivocal sense of the words?—Is his oath a truth, or the contrary?—If it be not true, what is it?—What would it be in a civil concern?—

But are there none who swear the above oath of adherence, and yet *do disbelieve* some parts of the Confession? Are there no good men who *disbelieve* that the magistrate ought to punish with the sword whatever is contrary to truth or holiness? Let us hope there are. Are there none who disbelieve other of its doctrines?—If there be any good man who hath sworn as above, and yet disbelieves the 3d article of the 23d chapter of the Confession, what does he himself think of his oath? Could he swear it again, or can he justify himself in continued adherence to it? Is such conduct ingenuous? Is it true?—Let us take an impartial view of such oaths of adherence in the pale of the Roman, of the Episcopalian, of the Presbyterian churches. Let us compare writings, sermons, speeches, with these standards, and say, how many, rather how exceedingly

† Dundas's Abridgement, page 156.

ceedingly few do swear in sincerity, and without mental reservation? And are there men whose veracity is beyond suspicion; whose word and honour are current as gold on every other subject, and yet must their solemn oath be incredible when religion comes to be the subject? Is religion the only department where *Truth* is not indispensable? Is it less dangerous to falsify to God than to men? Ananias and his wife probably thought so; but Peter thought otherwise.*

The fault is not so much in the agents as in the business. The use of such standards seems to render the evil unavoidable. Two parties of conscientious Dissenters, have of late been endeavouring to purify their standards. The wish and attempt seemed laudable; but the success has been small. Neither, has got its Formula cleared from obvious flaw.† And if they could render them unexceptionable to themselves, it is doubtful if they would stand the test with posterity. The Westminster Confession was as perfect, perhaps, as we can expect any thing of its kind; yet it seems quite unfit for the purpose to which it has been applied: and so we may expect will every other.

In fine, *all such adherence to human standards seem unprofitable in the church.* It is not said that such adherence, used as the condition of obtaining a benefice, is useless, considering the ministry in the light of a business. Perhaps, also, such adherences may be useful in a religious, or political party affair; but,

It is *unprofitable* when used to render the doctrine of scripture more precise, and to render agreement, or disagreement of opinion, more easily ascertained. Even the adherers to Creeds are often at variance
concern-

* Acts v. 1—10.

† Is *Quest.* 2d, in Burgher's Formula true, or consistent? Are *Quest.* 2d and 3d, in Antiburgher's, consistent?

concerning the true sense of their own standards.

The Bible is adhered to in one standard or confession; this confession is adhered to in covenants; these covenants are renewed in other covenants. All the foregoing are more expressly approved in an Act and Testimony, and other acts. A Formula binds to the whole—Thus we get a system of acts explaining acts, and referring to other acts. In such a system something difficult, something inconsistent is to be expected. It is difficult to find a confession either consistent with itself, or indisputable in its meaning. Accordingly, there are some sects who reject all such standards, and by using only the Bible to this purpose, are equally unanimous as those who use them, and understand mutually the opinions, each of other, equally well.—Are the subscribers of the same Creed generally of the same mind?

Besides, such standards are approved differently by different classes: some just now, adhere to the Confession as explained, 1647 and 1648: some as explained 1647 and 1796: some as received by their own church courts: some adhere to it as they did in a former private subscription, in which probably they owned, that it contained *some* leading doctrines of Christianity. Some, *as far as* agreeable to the word of God: some as agreeable to this word, and as the confession of their own faith. In all these ways, honourable mention of the Confession has been made, and the laity often abused and pleased. Only the last kind of adherence is the original one intended. The rest serve to defeat its design as a test of orthodoxy.

But even when it is used in that way, it is unable to discover any but the truly honest. It is the business of the dishonest to falsify. This test of orthodoxy

doxy cannot prove him. It is by it he hides. He perhaps wishes a benefice. It is necessary to falsify. Were he to declare himself in his own words, he might betray himself, or find difficulty in forging a credible cheat; but here are words made ready; a falsehood fabricated to his hand, which he knows before-hand will be current. The honest again needs no such test. He is willing to declare himself explicitly, and as desirous to be known by those he wishes to join, as to know them. But because he is honest, he will not profess adherence to any articles he does not believe; nor swallow by lump the church's Creed if it contain such articles. He is, therefore, frequently excluded. A church with standards may become as a sieve, which retains the chaff while it transmits the wheat. Is this a common case? Ask the experience of North and South Britain.

But I shall conclude this part of the subject, with the words of a great man, a zealous friend to strict orthodoxy, and a member of a church which abounds in such standards.—“What good purpose does the imposition and the subscription of unnecessary forms, of human composition, tend to promote? It is a fence far too low to keep out men of little or no principle; and too high, sometimes, for men of real integrity to surmount. It often opens a door to the abandoned, who, ostrich like, care not what they swallow, so they can but make subscription a bridge to secular interest: and for the truly honest, it frequently either quite excludes them from a sphere in which they might be eminently useful; or, obliges them to testify their assent in such terms, and with such open professed restrictions, as render subscription a mere nothing.” †

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† Toplady in *Life of Zanchy*.

THE foregoing thoughts on Infant-Baptism, Presbytery and Subscription, were suggested while the Author was engaged with the Antiburgher Synod on the subject of the pamphlet, entitled, *Candid Inquiry*, above inserted. In May 1795, he was suspended from preaching, for having written, and refusing to retract said pamphlet. In May 1796, he was *restored* his licence, upon acknowledging, as now related in the notes on the pamphlet, owning 'that it would have been more proper to have shewed the manuscript to some of the ministers, before it was published,' and submitting* to a rebuke for what he had acknowledged amiss in his conduct. As, however, he had now taken new ground, he thought it necessary to read to the Synod the following declaration.

DECLIN-

* To submit to a sentence of Rebuke and Restoration, while entertaining such views, and about to declare such sentiments as are contained in the declinature, appears, upon review, highly blameable and uncandid. A desire to obtain an opportunity of owning freely to the Synod wherein he thought he had wronged them, and which he feared an earlier declaration of his sentiments would preclude:—an aversion to shrink from a trial while in the state of a pannel:—a desire, by bringing the process to a termination, to promote the cause in which he was embarked even among those he must leave.—A wish to part with the Synod on exactly defined terms:—a horror at the prospect of parting with dearly beloved and highly respected friends:—a natural timidity, and an embarrassed state of mind in the struggle of the occasion—these were his true reasons for deferring so long a proper declaration of his sentiments. He is convinced, however, that none of them, nor all of them put together, could justify a voluntary submission to an authority exercised in the name of Christ, while he believed it had not Christ's warrant. Thus he virtually admitted what he reckoned a profanation of Christ's name. Here he needs and wishes forgiveness from God and men.

DECLINATURE.

*To the ASSOCIATE SYNOD, now sitting at Cross-
caussey Church, Edinburgh.*

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

BECAUSE some things which are sinful, or doubtful, in my view, are required by this Synod as terms of Ministerial Communion, I cannot be admitted to, nor join in the same. Particularly,

1st, It is a term of such communion, that a person practise what is called Infant-Baptism; that he profess his belief that it is warranted in the word of God; that he apply scripture to defend it. But I believe it sinful in itself—a piece of will-worship, involving (as all will-worship does) a degree of idolatry; and being a profanation of the name of God, by affixing this name to a human device; and, as other devices of men, involving much absurdity in its practice. I believe it is not warranted in the Word of God, and so I cannot, without gross iniquity, profess to believe it so warranted. I believe that all attempts to apply scripture to prove it are sinful, being so many impotent endeavours to wrest the scriptures; to add to them, and diminish from them; to issue and circulate a forgery on the Holy Ghost; saying, Thus saith the Lord, when the Lord hath not said; and so I could not, durst not apply scripture to such purpose.

2d, It is a term of communion with this Synod, that a person profess to believe that their mode of using Creeds and Forms of Human Composition, is warranted in scripture; and to apply scripture to prove this warrantableness as occasion offers. Also,
that

that this mode is good for the edification of the Church, and the security of the truth of the gospel. But all this seems to me *doubtful*; for I can find no warrant for it in *scripture*. I do not find that it is necessary to preserve unity of opinion, for this is found in *great perfection*; and it is found in favour of the true gospel where it is not. I do not find that it is useful; for where it is, often either the persons do not subscribe and adhere in sincerity; or, if they do, they often have different views of what they subscribe and profess adherence to. So that forms become powerful means, not by which professors may know each others sentiments; but by which they may conceal them, and mutually deceive each other. Besides all this, being imperfect, they involve (being so used) much grievance of conscience, after their imperfections are discovered and confessed by many, before deliverance from the practice and profession of them can be obtained.—This matter being so doubtful, I cannot profess approbation of such a mode of using Forms as this Synod requires, nor practise accordingly, without sin.

3d, It is a term of Ministerial Communion in this Synod, that a person profess that the *judicial authority* claimed by this Court, and others similar to it in their constitution, is founded on, and agreeable to the word of God, and to apply scripture to support such profession; to hold also, that such constitution belongs to that unity of the body of Christ so much inculcated in scripture. I cannot find, however, that such a *judicial authority*, and such exercise of it are warranted in scripture. I dare not forge on the Holy Ghost, as (I fear it would be) by applying scripture, to support it. I doubt if it be essential to that unity of the church recommended in the New Testament, and exem-

plified in it. I am not clear, that *judicial authority* as practised amongst Seceders, does not involve too much of a lordship over conscience in those who exercise it; and too much of a calling man *Lord* and *Master* in religious matters, in those who submit to it. Therefore, lest I should wrest scripture, and abet what I fear may be, not a lawful, appointed authority in the church of God, but an usurpation over his heritage; lest I should give to men that submission which may be due to Christ alone; lest I should be guilty of saying, *Thus saith the Lord*, of what *He hath not said*; and, *Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*. I cannot profess to believe, that such a Presbyterian Church Government, as is taught and practised by this Synod, is *founded on*, and *agreeable to* the word of God, without much gross iniquity.

For the above Reasons, concerning *Infant-Baptism*, *Subscription*, and *Presbyterial Church Government*, and not from any personal *dislike* to any of this Synod's members; nor from any personal respect to what I have been engaged in, in a process before this court. *I must*, and *do hereby* DECLINE such Communion, as cannot be enjoyed but on said terms, and such authority as I fear may be unscriptural and usurped. At the same time declaring, that I reckon the members of this court, and many people under their inspection, the saints and servants of God, and my dear brethren in Christ.—That as I believe this step of mine is a degree of nearer conformity to Christ's law; I believe also (if it be so) it renders my union with every Christian united to *Him*, particularly the members of this Synod and saints under their inspection, more intimate.—That I wish to *walk* with each one of them *by the same rule, and mind the same things*,

far as we have attained, in Christian love and fellowship; and in preaching and hearing the gospel of Christ, † if the members of Synod could see the same admissible.—And hereupon I do decline as above, take instruments, and crave extracts.

EDINBURGH, }
May 4th, 1796. }

JAMES WATT.

The above is a true copy.

JAS. MORISON, Syn. Clk.

On receiving the above Declaration and Declination, the Synod, after prayer by a brother, immediately put, and passed nem. con. the vote, *Deprive Mr. Watt of his Licence, and Excommunicate with the sentence of the Lesser Excommunication.* The sentence was passed, accordingly, by the Moderator; to which sentence Mr. Watt refused subjection, as he had already declined the Synod's judicial authority.

The note of a minute is true.

JAS. MORISON, Syn. Clk.

† This part of this wish was the fruit rather of feeling, than of judicious deliberation.

FINIS.

